IN HIS OWN HAND.

AUTHOR OF

"GOD'S PROVIDENCE HOUSE."

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IN HIS OWN HAND.

BY

MRS. G. LINNÆUS BANKS,

AUTHORESS OF

"GOD'S PROVIDENCE HOUSE," "THE MANCHESTER MAN," "FORBIDDEN TO MARRY," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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IN HIS OWN HAND.

CHAPTER I.

THE NEW LOVE AND THE OLD.

William Hutton followed his departing visitors with his eyes up the High Town, then deliberately took down his shutters, dusted his counters, re-arranged his windows so as to exhibit fresh pages or pictures against the foot-wide panes, and then turned to cut the edges of some book-sheets in his press; but he did it mechanically, and as if his mind was ill at ease. He could not convince himself he was blameless either towards his sister or Susannah Finch.

He could not hear the grumbling of old Finch that he had 'wasted his money in dressing up Susannah to no purpose since she had not been clever enough to secure young Hutton for a mate;' or the characteristic advice of Mrs. Perkins to the disconsolate girl

who made no longer secret of her sorrow, "Wait until he misses us, child: when he has to cook his own dinners, and clean his own house, as well as mind his business, he will find the want of a wife." He did not know how Susannah sobbed herself to sleep night after night, or how ready she was to escape from her father's sneers to the house in Bearward Lane, where she had learned to spin, and to seam stockings to earn a living independently of her miserly father, and where she could at least hear the fickle William spoken of without reviling.

But he could miss the "neat-handed Phillis," who had helped to set out his meals so appetizingly, and the voices that made such pleasant music by his fireside; and still more he missed the hands that cleared away saucepans and crockery when done with, and ashes from the fire-place, and dust from the furniture where it accumulated. He felt the want of some one to market and cook for him so that he might give all his own time to his work or to his business. Grumbling in the ears of Mr. Grace, the latter asked, "Why dost thee not marry? Why not make up to thy sister's young friend? She is a comely young woman."

"I must come to an understanding with these rascally Overseers before I can think of

a wife; and—a—Miss Finch is not altogether to my mind."

"What dost thee think of boarding with me till thee gets a wife or a housekeeper of thy own? I shall be glad to have a sensible companion at my table."

William snapped at the widower's offer, terms were arranged—and he congratulated himself on saving the cost of a wife or a servant, and his own time also.

Orders for bookbinding came in faster than he could execute them. He was at work late and early. He had little leisure save on the Sunday, and besides poetical composition he found an unsuspected occupation for his solitary hours. A stronger love than that of woman was creeping into his soul, never to be wholly dislodged.

There was then in Birmingham no bank. Certain responsible tradesmen took charge of the spare cash of others; but for fifteen years after William Hutton had settled in the town there was no definite establishment dealing solely with moneys and securities. Had there been, no doubt he would have there placed his spare capital to accumulate.

As it was, he took a special pleasure in watching it grow. Nightly, when all was closed in, and he alone, he counted over his gains, not merely for the day, but the sum

total of sterling guineas kept in his old desk, over and above the capital invested in his business; and proud was he when, long before another year was transferred to the file of the past, he had fifty of the golden coins to marshal before him on the table, fifty guineas overplus, to which he was surely adding week by week.

He was growing to love this glittering store over much. It was a feast to his sight, and he denied himself not only feasts but comforts to increase it, working late and early with his own hands to keep pace with orders, yet employing no help.

Had this gone on the heart of the man might have been utterly given over to avarice.

A kind Providence interposed to correct this. Either the persecution of the illogical Overseers, who refused the levies of a prospering man for fear of some future collapse, or the strain of overwork on his nerves, or his anxiety to accumulate, or an insanitary abode, or all combined brought on a serious illness. Feeling incapable of attending to his customers, he closed his shop early one Thursday evening and sought Mr. Dowler.

So much worse was he by the time he reached Bull Street, that the surgeon "blooded" him then and there, and lent him an arm back to the Gateway.

He was in a high state of fever, and the doctor not only ordered him to bed, but assisted to get him there. Then he looked round and took a survey of the place. Furniture there certainly was, but in a very different condition to that in which it had been left by Mrs. Perkins and Susannah, and of provision for an invalid there was none. William's mind had already begun to wander. He babbled about his gold and his old desk, and his work.

The good doctor was perplexed. He had never penetrated beyond the back parlour to smoke a pipe, and had no idea how the bookselling bachelor lived in his den. Straightway he went to Mr. Grace, who stood at his shop door.

"Mr. Grace," said he, "Mr. Hutton is dangerously ill. In fact, is in a fever, in my opinion not fit to be left, yet there he is alone in his house, with no one to care for him. What is to be done? Has he no relations?"

"None nearer than Derby or Nottingham," answered the Quaker gravely. "The drunken old sot in Derby, whom he calls father, would be no use if here, and I do not know where to find his good sister in Nottingham."

"Derby and Nottingham!" exclaimed the doctor, "the man might be dead before we could communicate with friends so far away,

and in my opinion buried too before a sister could get here from Nottingham! Will you or your housekeeper go in and watch by his bedside whilst I set off to the workhouse in search of some woman to nurse him?"

"Certainly. I will go myself. The persevering young man standeth high in my esteem. I am grieved to hear of his affliction."

It was a good stretch to Lichfield Street, where the workhouse was situated, the ways were dark and uneven, and being Thursday night drunken people abounded. With his stick in one hand, a horn lantern borrowed from Mr. Grace in the other, the good doctor set off on his errand through the dispersing crowd of market people. It was not the first time he had gone thither for a like purpose, and he was known to the officials. But the word "fever" created a scare. Only one woman was found willing to undertake the charge and risk, one the authorities were glad to be rid of at any rate. She did not belong to the parish, and had a brawling tongue.

"She's no beauty," said the doctor to Mr. Grace, when in about an hour's time he was back with the woman who called herself "Jane Smith," "but she will be better than no one, and she professes to be a nurse. It is quite time there was a hospital in the town where

nurses might be trained and found at any hour."

"Aye, aye," assented Mr. Grace, and after the doctor's instructions to the nurse, the pair were leaving, when the latter suddenly bethought him.

"I say," he whispered, "where does Mr. Hutton keep his money? We have no voucher for Jane Smith's honesty?"

Mr. Grace pointed to the old desk. "Had you not better take charge of it," said Mr. Dowler, "there is not much else of value to carry away, except the books."

"Aye, my friend, I think it might be well if I did." And so the desk with its contents went into safe custody next door, and the unknown Jane Smith was left in charge, alike of the patient and the premises.

For quite a fortnight William Hutton lay on his bed upstairs, only to feel in his lucid intervals that his shop was closed, and his business at a standstill.

Then the woman Jane Smith filled him with fears of he knew not what. He had been ill a week before he recognized her, and then his fear took shape.

The doctor and Mr. Grace seeing his repugnance, and observing how attentive she was to the sick man, concluded that his dislike arose from the megrims of disease, and that he was

raving when he called her "Peg," just as he had raved of Catherine, and "Dolly," and of his money.

"I do not much wonder at his dislike to Jane Smith, the woman is decidedly ill-favoured, and has an ill odour of gin about her. But this is common to all sick-nurses, and the mistaken name he gives her is only a common symptom in such cases."

The mistake was the doctor's. William could see and hear the woman peering and prowling about the house ever in search of something, and naturally associated her prying with his store of gold. Then he could have told how rough she was when no friends were present, and how she drank and slept the livelong night. But he was afraid of her, and when the doctor came to his bedside, tapping the lid of his ever ready snuff-box, or inhaling the essences in the pouncet-box top of his cane, he dared not express his fears or tell all he knew, for she was always at his elbow, as civil as a cross-grained woman could be.

Nor dared he ask about his desk, lest he should mark it out to her.

His fears and his anxieties retarded his recovery, and at times Dr. Dowler shook his head, very doubtful of the end.

On one of these occasions, when his patient was lucid but very low and languid, the doctor

after tapping his snuff-box lid twice or thrice to shake the loose powder from the hinges, and after one or two liberal pinches of the mixture and as vigorous an application of his red-and-yellow Barcelona silk handkerchief, ventured to make a suggestion long on his mind.

"You are decidedly better to-day, Mr. Hutton, but you fluctuate very much, and you appear to have so detrimental a dislike to Jane Smith that I would seriously advise you to send for a relative to take her place. Although, in my opinion she hath nursed you so far satisfactorily."

William looked at him in silence.

He went on. "Then—a—a—perhaps it might be as well if you—a—made—a—will, supposing you have not done so."

A swift change swept across the patient's face. Had he been making money only to leave it?

"Do you—do you—think *death* so near, Doctor?" he gasped, all in a quiver.

"No, but you are feeble, the humours in the blood are—a—at present you are better—but—death is always at hand—and in my opinion every man who has anything to leave should make a will, be he ill or well."

"I must—think it over—Doctor. If I am—no better—to-morrow perhaps," he articu-

lated in faint gasps. "But I feel stronger—and if you are satisfied with Peg—we need not alarm or trouble—my sister Catherine. She would come—but—" Then the doctor caught only the words "expense"—and "offended."

The proposal had given him a shock; but the shock proved a stimulant. No will was made, no Catherine was summoned. He continued to amend, but he also continued to call his attendant "Peg," and took neither food nor medicine from her hands without a shudder. At which the doctor gravely shook his bewigged head, and plied both snuff-box and handkerchief with perturbed frequency.

A strong constitution and an abstemious life triumphed. In about ten days the doctor's "opinion" was that his patient would suffer less anxiety from a removal to the sofa downstairs, where he could overlook the re-opened shop where his heart had been all the while, and where he could be consulted relative to the wants of customers. They were not expected to be numerous, considering how long the place had been closed. He did not know how strong was William's desire to get rid of his offensive nurse.

His first glance on coming downstairs went involuntarily to the corner where his desk should have been. A deadly pallor and faint-

ness came over him. He gasped out, "Where is my desk?"

"Whatn desk?" cried the nurse. "Are you goin' off your head again? Here, yow'd best lie down if yow be goin' to swoon."

He felt as if he should. Sofa and himself seemed whirling backwards in a circle, his only consciousness being that his desk and money were gone.

The woman thought he was dying. Unasked she rushed next door to say so.

In came Mr. Grace in great concern.

"What is the matter, friend Hutton; art thou worse?"

"My desk is gone—and my money!" was the answer, in a low wail.

"Nay, friend, make thy mind easy. I have thy desk in charge. Friend Dowler suggested that it would be safest in my keeping whilst thou had strangers about thee. Peradventure thee would like to have it back?"

"No, no!" said William from his pillow, with a mind relieved. "Not yet. Not whilst"—and his low voice sank to a lower whisper—"not whilst Peg Harris is here."

She was not there long. No sooner was he fairly on his feet and able to make inquisition into his affairs than she decamped.

Overnight, when he had supposed her gone an errand, she had listened by the unclosed

window on the staircase whilst he told Dr. Dowler and the Quaker that his mind was not astray when he called her Peg. That she was the daughter of the man Harris who had been hanged in Nottingham for deer stealing and violent resistance of the keepers; accounting for his knowledge of the woman by his chance rencontre under the newly-erected gallows.

"I have a good memory for faces, and hers gave me a shock not to be forgotten." (Had he seen it then, or the threatening hand upraised behind the panelling, he would not have forgotten that.) He went on to say, "Now I find a number of valuable books have disappeared during my illness, and I mean to know what she hath done with them."

"In my opinion she hath sold them for gin. I wondered how she obtained it," put in the doctor.

"I would send the treacherous jade to the House of Correction!" cried the irate Quaker. "Robbing a sick man deserveth no lenity."

There was no opportunity to send her anywhere. She had betaken herself off when William rose the next morning. And when he would have gone to meeting on the Sunday, lo! his best suit had vanished also.

This was loss upon loss, but in his thankfulness for the recovery of his health, and the

safety of the hoard in his desk, he was willing to let the culprit go. He had not yet forgotten the sale of his sister's books, if the abstracted two shillings was fading into a ghostly shadow.

Nowadays a closed shop would kill a business. His speedily revived, curiosity bringing back many of his patrons. And singularly enough the loss of his black suit proved a signal service.

It was needful to equip his outer man once more, and to the same Bull Street draper he betook himself with his order—not for black, but for bottle-green broad-cloth. Five of his guineas went to pay for the suit, but he still remembered that he had nearly parted with them altogether, and his renovated appearance justified the outlay.

He thought he had made a capital investment when he discovered that Mr. Perry, his tailor and draper, had become an Overseer, and that his two suits of clothes turned the official scale in his favour.

He was at last, after two years' controversy, admitted to pay the ordinary levies like other reputable tradesmen of the town.

Now, he began to look out for an apprentice, when one he did not seek for was thrown in his way—and scarcely by *chance*.

He was closing his shop shutters at dusk

one evening in July, when he happened to cast his eyes towards the Old Cross weather-cock with a half-murmured wish that the clock face looked north, so that he could see how time sped without waiting till the hours struck, when bringing his eyes down to the level they rested on the figures of a woman and child seated on the low flat steps.

Something in the hopeless attitude of the woman pierced his breast as with an arrow. Money-making was forgotten. The deserted Market Place, the hour, the season, all recalled the time when he sat there a forlorn fugitive. He almost expected to see two men in leathern-aprons cross from the end of Philip Street to comfort the poor creature. Then he had an uncomfortable feeling that he had never sought out those two men who had helped him in his sore need. Had he too literally interpreted his sister's advice to "pick up no friends he might afterwards wish to drop?"

He put up his last shutter, re-entered his shop, closed the half door, was about to unhook the upper half—when he paused with his hand up, to look out.

The woman was still there, in the same position, and the lad with his head lying against her lap.

So *he* had sat alone, waiting for a hand to raise him.

He unlatched his door, crossed the empty Market Place, and spoke to the poor creature, whose head was bent down between her hands.

"My poor woman, why are you sitting here with your child? Why do you not go home?"

"I hae no whom," said she, "no work, no money, no food. We are weary an' famishin'."

He put his hand in his pocket and drew forth sixpence. "This may relieve your necessities for the——"

She lifted her head.

"My God!" he exclaimed, "it is Dolly! And come to this!"

CHAPTER II.

DOLLY'S BURDEN.

What was there in the voice or in the faded blue eyes of the worn and bedraggled woman that recognition was so swift?

Surely but for that fortuitous meeting in Charnwood she would have been as one utterly unknown, so changed was she for the worse.

He had seen her then in rent and untidy garments, with few traces of the rosy-cheeked prettiness that had once held him in thrall. And now he saw a face where want and suffering and hardship had obliterated all softness, all charm. Yet the eyes spoke, and he stood aghast.

She, too, looked amazed. The hand she had held out for the proffered sixpence dropped.

"Why, it's never thee!" she cried in a sort of shuddering wail. "Aye, Bill Hutton, come to this! Come to die o' starvation in th' street, an' all through marrying a lazy wastrell. If I married hastily, I've had ample time to repent. Yow may well look down on me, an'

despisen me. An' *yow!* I took yow fur a gentlemon."

The change in him had been all favourable. His dress was homely enough, but prosperity had invested him with something more than good garments. He was self-supporting, self-reliant, and held his head erect, as one whom his fellows respected.

Once before he had been recognized as "a gentleman," and the word was pleasant in his ear as then.

"Nay, Mrs. Field, he said, "I am but a tradesman, working my way up with my own hands. But you must not talk of dying of starvation in the streets. You gave me shelter and food when I was a benighted wanderer in Charnwood. I cannot suffer you to perish of hunger and exposure whilst I have a house of my own open to shelter you and your boy. My heart bleeds for your distress."

He helped her to her feet, and, not sorry for the dusk or the fewness of the people about to observe the shabby, dusty, and way-worn creatures in his care, took the child by the hand to lead him away, and bade her follow, which she did as if in a dream, just as a few heavy drops of rain began to fall.

"Ah! this must be little 'Vill,'" he said, as the light of a candle on his counter fell on

the pale brown hair of the boy. "And where is your black-headed brother?"

"In his grave—where I wish I warr," was the sharp and bitter answer of Dolly Field, following him into the room behind the shop, where he left them to sit down whilst he secured the shop-door against intrusion, not caring to hazard further remark or question.

If he dined with Mr. Grace he took his other meals in his own home, and had simple food at hand.

The boy, who had never spoken a syllable, stared wistfully at the loaf the strange man set on the table, and devoured the thick bread and butter offered to him with an eagerness which spoke of long privation. There was the milk provided for William's own supper, and at least the third of a cheese, and 'such as he had they were welcome to with right good will.'

Dolly Field bore no resemblance to a Niobe. She could set her teeth and endure the inevitable, could answer abuse with taunt and invective, but either the reaction from the despair of destitution, the heartiness of the welcome accorded, or the reflection that she might have been mistress of such a home but for her own imprudence, touched some unsuspected fountain, and covering her eyes with her unwashed hands, she wept bitterly.

"Don't, mammy!" pleaded the boy; "eat somethin', and don't cry."

It was one of William's economics never to burn an unnecessary fire. Hence his cold supper in the warm summer months.

Though every vestige of his love for Dolly had died out with his esteem, he could but pity her downcoming, and feel unnerved by her tears.

"You are overcome by fatigue," said he then, "perhaps a cup of tea might refresh you. We will soon have a fire alight."

A turf, and a few sticks from a faggot brought from a kitchen in the rear were speedily burning in the grate under his small copper kettle, and with the ease of long bachelorhood he set about providing what he called "woman's panacea," now and then giving her a word of good cheer, for her tears made him restless and uncomfortable.

There was a roll of distant thunder, and the rain beat sharply against the window. "Ah," said he, "when I looked up at the sky and the weathercock just now I knew that a storm was brewing."

Her eyes were once more dry. With a flash of her old spirit, though without its vivacity, she burst forth, "There are always storms brewin' somewhere, an' we mun face them as we best can. Did yow not think yow set a

storm brewin' when yow brotn us to yowr hearthstone?"

"I thought that you were in want, and that I had the means to relieve you. An Indian savage would not have turned away from the claim you had upon my hospitality." (He did not say charity.) "But you are not helping yourself. Drink this, and when you are refreshed, and have satisfied the cravings of hunger—and *I* know how sharp they are—you can tell me, if you please, what has brought you to this wretchedness. Then we must think what can be done for you. Come hither, Vill," he added, as another heavy peal of thunder rattled overhead and the boy visibly trembled, though he uttered no sound of fear.

Readily enough the child crossed the hearth and sought protection at his side.

"Ah," mused William, "I was not so big a chap as you when I was sent to work in a mill. Would you like to work, Vill, and get money."

"I don't know, sir, I should like some more bread and milk But my name's not 'Vill,' sir, it is Bill."

More bread and milk was set before him; his helper looking into the clear eyes and frank face as if questioning his own memory for a shadowy likeness, and saying, "You called yourself 'Vill' when I saw you first, and you

wanted to come with me. Would you like to stay with me now?"

The boy looked up wonderingly in his face, then across at his mother. "Did I ever see yow before, sir? Would mammy stay, too?"

Without answering the boy's question William Hutton, parting the tangled locks from his open brow, and rising to snuff the candle, said to Mrs. Field, then demonstrating how truly she had used the word "famishing," "I am in want of an apprentice. I like your boy's face. If you will leave him with me I will teach him my trade and use him well."

She seemed to snap at the offer.

"Will yow," she exclaimed, "I shouldn be thankful! There wouldn be a great burthen off my shoulders, and he wouldn be in th' best o' hands. *Yow* wouldn teach him to work honestly for a living, an' feed an' clothe him. The poor lad needs some one to care for him and see *he* dunnot go to ruin."

It needed no interpreter to tell William whence arose the intense feeling with which she spoke, or why her sensitive nostrils dilated and quivered with suppressed scorn; though he was not so wise as he imagined

"Yes, I would do my part by the lad, and I think he would be willing to remain, but we should want the signature of his father to the indentures."

Dolly Field started to her feet.

"His faither! An' wheere wouldn yow look fur him? I wouldn give——"

She broke off short, then in another tone resumed:

"I ha' left the brute as I married, an' ha' brot that child wi' me to save his misfortunate little life. I thot it better to face th' world an' privation than see him killed afore my eyes wi' ill-usage, killed oather body or soul."

Her blue eyes kindled as she spoke. "Ax the lad," she went on. "Bill, wouldn yow raither stay wi' this gentlemon or go back to faither?"

The boy crushed closer to Mr. Hutton's side, with a frightened look on his face. "Oh, don't take me back to faither, he kicks me so! Wouldn yow kick me, sir, if I stopped here wi' yow?"

"No, no, my boy. I was less than you, so little, that I had to have pattens made to raise me high enough, when I was sent to a silk-mill, and was kicked and caned till my back was all wheals and sores. I would not treat a dog as I was treated."

The boy looked steadfastly in the speaker's kindly face. "I think I shouldn like to stay with yow, sir."

As he spoke the clock in the Old Cross struck nine.

Dolly rose, drew her hood over her face, and the far worn apology for a cloak around her.

"It's time I was going," said she, "I will leave Bill wi' you, Mr. Hutton; an' am gratefully thankful fur a' yowr kindness."

"You cannot go out in this storm, Mrs. Field, with no shelter. You are quite free to sleep on that sofa to-night, and Bill with me, if you will give him a wash. In the morning we can settle about his indentures, and how I can best help you."

She stood for a moment hesitating. "If Field knew——," she muttered, then defiantly, "Whatn do I care?"

And there the weary wayfarer was left, with the quilt from William's own bed as a covering.

In the morning when the bookseller, always an early riser, came down stairs, he found the floor and hearth swept, the fire alight, the kettle singing, and Dolly Field with a face clean washed at the pump in the back-yard.

He had left Bill, or Vill, as he chose to call him still, soundly asleep—the sleep of utter exhaustion.

The manifestations of a woman's presence were somewhat new to him of late. At once his thoughts went off at a tangent to his sister Catherine and Susannah Finch, to the disad-

vantage of Dolly Field, who had not reached their point of superfine neatness.

She speedily turned his thoughts into another channel, as she saw him put on his working apron, and with shirt sleeves tucked up, proceed to measure and cut up millboard to size for magazine binding at a side-table—no other than the old corn-chest—under the window.

"I am glad, sir, yow left th' poor child asleep. An' I thank God that He hath gi'en me an opportunity to relieve my mind o' a great burthen, an' save the good little fellow from worse wrong than hath been already done him."

William turned round sharply from his work. "Wrong done him! What do you mean?"

"Whatn I say, Mr. Hutton; but theere, Field's been a bad enough husband to me, but I don't want to get him into trouble he don't deserve, and afore I tell yow a word more, I mun have yowr solemn promise not to repeat whatn I tell yow, either to Bill or any one else."

"My old friend Mr. Webb cautioned me against rash oaths and rash promises. If you find your secret a burthen, so may I," objected the bookbinder seriously, though not without the latent desire for information, which was so powerful an element in his composition.

"Bother Mr. Webb," interjected Dolly,

"what hath he to do wi' that child? And look yow! Don't yow run agen me when I'm tryin' to do reet fur once i' my life. I don't know another soul as I'd trust but yow, an' my heart's fair like to burst wi' trouble, fur I wantn to save th' lad an' I don't know how by mysen. Thy promise 'll hurt neither thee nor any one else."

He saw she was bursting to open her heart to him, but no promise would he give. The secrets of such men as Field were best unknown. He did not care to be entrusted with aught that his conscience might prompt him to reveal. Having grown to manhood and citizenship he was law abiding to the backbone.

"Anything you may think proper to say to me I will listen to, if it is nothing I might feel bound to disclose. I should certainly be more satisfied to know what brings you into your forlorn condition, and whether I could rightly take the boy as an apprentice without his father's sanction."

"His faither's—!" she jerked out contemptuously, then stopped short, drumming impatiently with her finger ends on the table where the breakfast bowls and cups were set. In a few moments, however, she sat down with her elbows on the board, and dropping her face between her hands began,

"Well, Mr. Hutton, I don't think as yowd say aught to get your owd sweetheart's husband into trouble, an' if I canno save mysen I wantn to keep that poor lad from want and wickedness, I dun."

"Any good mother would," assented he.

"Aye, aye," said she, somewhat irritably, adding, "I mun tell yow my own way, an' I shall do it a' the better if yow turn your back and get on wi' your work."

He took her at her word, and she began,

"Yow know as I warr a silly lass, wi' so many strings to my bow my head warr fair turned, and I thot I'd nobbut to pick and choose. But when Roper 'listed, an' yow turned your back on me, I warr fit to bite my own thumbs wi' spite an' vexation. An' then, like a fool, to show my own spirit I took up with one I knew naught about but whatn he telled me. He warr tall, good lookin', and masterful, and wi' his Latin and his larnin he dazzled poor me who hardly knew how to write my own name. He said he warr usher in his faither's school, and shouldn sometime be schoolmaster, an' he would make a lady on me. I took it a' fur Gospel. We warr wed, and then I found old Mr. Field knew naught about it, an' only took us in out o' pity fur my helpless ignorance. His house was a queer place—books here, pappers theere. I had

managed fur faither and thot I mowt manage fur him. But I couldna redd up th' place wi'out shifting his books and pappers, and that put him in a rage, an' he called me thowtless, an' extravagant, an' thriftless. An' then I up an' telld him that I hadna bin used to moiserly ways; that father an' me were not afead to spend what we earnt. An' I telld him I hadna come theere to be slave to him. An' then he bade me get out my lace cushion an' keep mysen' fur he wouldn keep us no longer, an' Francis warr too lazy to do it. This warr the upshot. He warr a upreet mon, as never did a wrong to noboddy, an' wouldna ha' telled a lie to save his life, or had a bit that wasna paid fur, an' he warr that larned he knew a' about everythin, but he warr awful particelar, an' dreadful strict an' stern. Folk said that thow he warr so good a schoolmaster he warr too fond o' using th' birch an' th' cane; an' that Francis mowt ha' been a better lad hadna th' old man threshed him so cruel.

"Be thatn as it may, when Francis took my part he telld his father thisn; an' then—oh, dear!—old Field turned round on him wi' such a tale of his wild misdoins as made me fit to sink in the earth wi' shame. But he laid a' the blame on two bad companions named Harris, as had first led his son astray.

Well, there warr a storm, an' I thot th' two wouldn ha' killed each other i' theer ragin' fury, an' I fell down in a fit, an' the next day as warr, my poor dear little Frank warr born. I warr ill a long while, an' it seems the old mon got to hear summat fresh as Francis had been doin'. So when I warr up, an' Frank chrisened, he up an' offered my husband a lot o' money he had saved if he would only go away from Southwell an' get an honest livin' out o' reach o' his bad companions. Francis warr fond o' me then, an' I went on my knees an' prayed to him. An' he promised his father an' me to turn o'er a new leaf."

"Not a better one, I fancy," put in William, busy with leather and paste-brush.

Dolly sighed, "No, he kept only haulf his promise. He went to Charnwood, and we lodged i' Swithland, whilst he built a house on th' waste, which he took for common land, and then began to cultivate a plot o' ground, an' I helped him all I could, an' while things warr growin' I made lace, an' two old maids named Ward, who had a shop in Swithland, sold it fur me. We might ha' bin very happy theere, but he had let old Harris help him to build the cottage, an' we warr never sure one or other o' th' lot wouldna' come down upon us to stop. Mappen when 'twur too hot fur them nearer whom. Ben an' Peg

had bin to school, and mowt ha' done fairly weel, fur theer mother wur old Field's sister, but old Harris warr a bad lot, an' they took after him."

"Aye," put in William, "virtues and vices run in the blood."

"Mappen they dun. My own dear boy Frank wur growin' masterful like his father; and mappen I'd more reet to thank God fur takin' him, than frettin' as I ha' done," and she sighed heavily. "Anyhow them Harrises couldna keep theer paws off other folk's game. Rabbits as ran wild an' warr thick as bees in a hive wouldna serve theer turn; an' it warr summat they done as browt them rioters down on us to pull down an' root up. It warr the ruin o' Francis. He cursed an' swore like a madman that he would never lay hand to spade, or do a day's work again. He wouldn live on them as wouldna let him live by honest labour. An' he kept his word. What he did or wheere he went God only knows. Me an' little Frank warr left fur days an' weeks to starve or live as we best could."

"You and Frank? Where was Vill?"

"Oh, aye—I should hae said th' childer," she said, as if suddenly recollecting. "Well, but fur my lace cushion we mowt hae starved. But I wouldna let Field know whatn I arnt or he'd hae set down and addled nowt. Some-

times he came back wi' money, sometimes cursin' his ill luck, an' me too. At last he came sneakin' whom one foggy afternoon in November, an' bolted th' door as if some one warr at his heels to tak him. He had been on his feet a' day an' neet, he said, an' had nor bite nor sup. I'd nowt but some blencon bread an' a mug o' milk, but he took it without a word, an' I knew summat warr up. Bit by bit he let out that Harris an' Ben had been caught and he had had a run fur it. But he seemed afead to put his head out o' th' door even to snare a rabbit to keep life in one.

"In a few days came Peg Harris, her as yow saw, an' I heard them whis'prin' an' knew both the rogues as led Field astray wor i' gaol. An' I warr thenkful, fur I thowt we warr shut o' them when Peg went. Shu had always money had Peg, howe'er she came by it, an' shu shared what shu had, I mun gie her her due. Well, three week or so after Christmas—an evil one for us—Peg turned up again. Shu came as stealthily as Field an' she browt wi' her——"

"What?" questioned William, as she made a sudden pause.

"How yow catch one up," she said swiftly. "Why—a bottle o' gin an' a bundle o' cloathes an' said shu had come to stay. An after that there never warr no peace. Bill

warr afead o' her, an' shu swore at th' lad, an' banged him about, because he warr—so—so like some folk shu had a grudge agen."

"Did not you interfere?"

"Aye, of course I did, and then Field turned round on me an' said th' lad wor none o' hisn, he did no' care what became o' th' brat."

William drew a long breath, turned and looked Dolly full in the face.

"Yow needna look at me, Mr. Hutton, th' lad warr as much hisn as mine, but when men tak to drink and bad ways theyn say anythin' to spite them as thwart 'em. An' yow see Frank took after him, an' had a' along been his father's darlin'. My heart ached fur little Bill, for even Frank warr encouraged to put on him, an' I did no daur to say a word when Peg or Field warr by. Thunner last neet warr nowt to Field when he cursed an' scowled till his black brows met. An' it warr awful to hear him an' Peg vowing to be revenged on some folk who had crossed their path i' some way."

She paused.

"Is this all you have to tell?"

"All I can tell yow now, fur here comes Bill downstairs."

"And I have my shop to open. It is time my shutters were down."

But ere he went to his task William hailed the bright boy as he stood on the last stair, and said to himself, "It would be a good work to rescue that lad from destruction. But I cannot quite fathom Dolly; she seems to be holding something back."

CHAPTER III.

THE BURDEN SHIFTED.

Mr. Hutton still retained his simple habits. He broke his fast with a good bowl of porridge.

That morning Mrs. Field prepared the breakfast, and "Vill," with fresh and shining face, was sent to eat his behind the shop counter, a pile of paper in the ream serving him for a seat. The lad did not complain that the milk was burnt, nor did their host, but the latter echoed in his heart old Mr. Field's opinion of the cook. Breakfast had become a secondary consideration in his desire to learn more of the Fields, and of the reason for the ill-treatment of the boy Vill. He could understand how a man of strong passions like Field would take fire under a jealous insinuation from an evil-minded woman like Peg, all the more since the child bore no resemblance to either parent, even his light hair had darkened since he saw them all in Charnwood.

He did stand in need of an apprentice.

He had taken a liking to the lad and thought it was mutual. He was desirous to help Mrs. Field, and to protect the boy—but he had no desire to compromise himself in any way.

The child's age was not a subject for consideration. More than half a century later infants six years old were sent out barefooted to work from five in the morning until six at night, winter and summer.

All Mrs. Field had now to tell was soon told.

"Yow remember th' neet as yow came fur shelter. Well, I warr a' in a tremble lest you shouldn know me, and ca' me by name, for that meant knowin' my husband's name. So I whispered i' your ear a warnin' and I warr thenkful to find yow understood, for I wouldna hae gien a bobbin fur your life had Field guessed yow knew one on us, he warr that wild an' desperate.

"He chuckled rarely when he came back from showin' yow th' road. He said yow wouldna find yor way back in a hurry. He'd 'taken yow round by Robin Hood's barn.'"

"Aye," interrupted William, "he did lead me a dance. But how was it I overook Peg on Trent Bridge?"

"Why, th' moment yor back warr turned she warr off like a hare. Mappen yow stopped long on th' road, an' Swithland warr far out

contrary, to say naught o' th' time Francis lost yow. And shu knew a' th' short cuts out o' th' way o' folk. Shu wor back i' less than a week, mad wi' grief an' rage, and let out that her faither warr hanged an Ben transported to Virginny. An' shu seemed to pitch her spite on Bill, poor lad, as if he couldn help her faither coming to th' gallows. But she brot th' news as Field's faither warr dead too, an' that folk dared him to show his face an' claim whatn th' old man had left behind him. The shock sobered Francis fur a bit, but he soon swore he'd carry off all that warr his own if the devil stood in the gap."

"He did it," interjected her confidant, "I can bear witness to that. He left a written declaration behind to say so. It was my hope he had there found means to lift you out of your poverty and distress."

"Aye, fur a time. He came ridin' back in about a fortneet in new cloathes, and a wig, and his eyebrows clipped till I hardly knew him. He brot us summat to eat, an' a bag full o' cloathes fur me an' the lads, an' then hurried us off an' wouldna let me stop an' take my lace cushion. He said I shouldna want it again. But, ah—me! manny's the starvin' day we han known fur want on it. Well, he put th' lads in the panniers of a packhorse he'd brot, and me on a pillion behind him, an' we rode

off to Lutterworth a'most like gentlefolk. He said he had got rid of Peg, thow it had cost him a lot, an' he meant to work and be respectable. An' so he mowt, fur what with his Latin an' his fine writin' he got to be clerk in a lawyer's office, an' he kept steady till Peg had spent all her money an' ferretted us out. It wor a bad job for us. He swore an' then he got drunk. Then he paid her to be off again. But it warr no use. Back shu came over an' over again, till he seemed to lose heart, an' to fall in wi' her bad ways again. An' then one night he took us off out on our beds, Bill an' all, wi' hardly time to put on our clothes, an' there warr Peg in a great josey an' a mon's hat, standing by a horse an' cart, ready to drive us off again into th' wide world. An' I knew summat wor up. We never looked up after that. We warr like gipsies wanderin' here an' theere, livin' I hardly know how. At last my own lad Frank sickened, an' there warr no gettin' a doctor, fur the hue-an'-cry warr out after Field, an' my boy died in a hovel worse than th' one i' Charnwood, among th' lime kilns somewhere i' Darbysheer. He warr buried on th' hill-side without a coffin, and without a parson, an' I think oather th' lime or my anguish burnt my eye-balls, fur I couldna shed a tear. That warr th' cap-sheaf o' my load o' trouble."

"Poor Dolly," murmured William as she went on, "Manny an' manny a time had me an' Field quarrelled o'er his laziness an' wild ways, but then I up an' telled him if I'd waited an' married an' honest hard-working mon like yow I'd never have had to go slinking about like a thief, or seen the boy I had nursed at my breast buried like a dog. That I came of honest folk, an' had never been ashamed to show my face till I became the wife of a vagabond. Mappen, I was hard on him, fur he loved Frank better nor hissen; but he up with his fist an' he knocked me down, and then he kicked little Bill about like a foot-ba,' and cursed us both, and said things as made my flesh fair creep. He warr that mad to see Bill thrivin' when his own lad lay underground, and in his ragin' fury he vowed that if Frank had then been buried like a dog, Bill should die a dog's death. An' Peg stood by an' grinned."

William interrupted her. "You called Frank your own lad, and your husband's own lad. Was not Bill your own, too?"

Again the look on her face as of one caught tripping.

"Oh, aye, aye—but yow know th' sick child, an' the dead child's always th' mother's dearest. An' as fur Field, he set a' his heart on Frank. He never had a good word for

Bill from th' day Peg brot—brot her mischief-makin' face and tongue among us. Frank warr his father's own lad all out."

"Ah, I understand now—proceed."

"Well, that neet he warr off poachin' or worse, an' Peg wi him—fur shu warr more like a man than a woman i' her ways, though she warr younger than me—an' then I stole away wi' th' lad; hidin' i' caverns, an' doin' a day's work fur bit and sup, an' sleepin' at farm-houses an' cottages. An', oh! how I longed for my lace cushion to earn a livin' fur th' lad an' me fairly. My faither had died three year or more, else I'd ha' gone to him."

She had told her tale with alternations of pathos and indignation, and William had listened intently. Now there was an interruption from his shop. When he returned from serving his customer he asked,

"Was it solely to save your boy from ill usage and the taint of bad example, and the fear lest he should be led deliberately into wickedness that caused you to steal away with him?"

"In part it warr; in part it wor the death o' my boy, fur when he died there warr naught to bind me to Field an' th' evil life he led. An' when he struck me to his feet he struck down all the love I had left fur him. He had brot me to rags, an' want, an' shame,

an' still I stuck to him. But when Franky died of hardship and starvation, brot about by his wickedness, I felt as if he had killed his lad. Aye, an' I telld him so! An' I made up my mind he should noather kill me nor little Bill; I'd save the good little un whatever came. An' when you brought us here, an' talked o' takin' him to prentice, I just thot th' hands o' God had led us here to save him."

"It hath that aspect," assented Mr. Hutton. "I sat on the steps of that Old Cross just as hopeless and friendless twelve years ago; a helping hand was extended to me. In turn I hold out a helping hand to distress as great. Wait here a while, and watch my shop. I go to consult my next neighbour."

The consultation was held on the step of Mr. Grace's shop. Presently he darted off up Bull Street, and Mr. Grace kept a look-out on the bookseller's door.

He came back ere long, with his friend, Mr. Perry, the tailor-overseer, his object being to make "Vill," as he called him, a parish apprentice, and so save the twenty-shilling stamp for his indentures.

Dolly looked half afraid, but when she heard Mr. Hutton explain,

"Here is the poor woman and her boy. You see how ragged they are. They were starving

when I found them on the steps of the Old Cross. I have offered to take the lad as an apprentice, and use him well, but I have no mind to pay twenty shillings for a stamp to bind him. If the parish will do that you can measure him at once for a strong suit of clothes, and I will fit the poor woman out a basket with writing-paper, quills, wafers, and a few books, and she may sell them round the country. Otherwise they will have to go to the workhouse, and be kept there, or removed at parish cost."

"Um—m," deliberated Mr. Perry. "You're a shrewd man of business, sir. However, come along with me, and we'll see what can be done."

He managed it, Dolly Field affixed her signature, or something which did duty for it, to the indentures after affirming that she did not know where the lad's father was to be found, and Bill Field, who made his mark, was bound for eleven years to a master who was to keep, clothe, and teach him his trade in all its various branches, allowing him certain wages, merely nominal for the first few years.

And Mrs. Field, freshened up in a gown cast off by Mr. Grace's housekeeper, with a well-brushed cloak, and a pair of strong new shoes, was full of gratitude as she set off to

sell the goods William Hutton had intrusted to her, with a promise to renew the stock when needful.

"If you succeed it will keep you and pay me," he told her. "The prices I have fixed are low. You will get a good profit."

Vill—for so Mr. Hutton elected to call him, as the child had so dubbed himself years before—cried and clung to her, and not even the promised new clothes would console him for the departure of his "mammy." She, however, evinced none of a mother's lingering fondness, and her outspoken thankfulness at being relieved of her burden, not less than her alacrity to depart, caused William to shake his head dubiously. It was, however, evident from his grief at parting, that she at least had not dealt unkindly by the boy. But the tears of childhood, like rain-drops on a poppy leaf, roll off and leave it fresh and dry. Vill, comfortably housed, sufficiently fed and decently clothed, scarcely knew how to contain the fulness of his satisfaction; and his gratitude to the master who neither kicked nor cuffed him, was shown in the readiness of obedience—under training.

His had been a vagabond life, the notion of work, continuous, plodding, industrial work, had never been presented to him. He did not take kindly to it when it was.

He would fetch and carry at bidding, but was eager to return to his station at the low half-door of the shop, mount on the lower of the wooden crossbars by which the panels were held together, and swing the door to and fro, watching the people pass, or rest idly hanging over to see the market-folk set up their stalls, spread out wares, or chaffer for the sale.

For a day or two this was overlooked, though it was not business-like. But William Hutton had no notion of keeping an apprentice to play. Many were the things a lad of eight years might do to help his master; many little household matters now regarded as absolutely woman's work, then considered the duty of indoor apprentices of either sex. By these he was expected to save hired labour.

He had to learn the sweeping and washing of floors, dusting of furniture, and shop-counter, laying out platters and bowls for meals, and removal afterwards.

This was not done by Vill without tokens of rebellion, for the lad had a naturally high spirit, and when at length his master called to him, "Come hither, Vill, you are here to work and not to play."

"I don't like work; faither did not work, he said work was fur slaves. Mammy never

set Frank to wash floors or bowls, an' he was bigger nor me."

"Ah, that's Francis Field's teaching," thought William. Aloud he said, "My lad, if you want to eat you must work. Idle hands make idle teeth. I have worked all my life, and so have my brothers. We began younger than you. There can be no idlers here. Come and do what I set you."

"I shanno! I likes to play."

"And you like to eat?"

"Aye."

This was in the morning. At noon William went to his dinner, neither leaving nor sending anything for the lad. In the evening he prepared his own meal, regardless of a second mouth, and cleared away everything, not leaving even a crust of bread.

This was too much for Bill. "I wants my supper!" said he.

"You have not earned it. I buy my food with my work."

This was a puzzle to Bill. "But I'm hungry!"

"Were you never hungry before?"

A sigh accompanied the rueful answer, "Aye, manny an' manny a time."

"That was because your father did not work and did not set you to work. Laziness

lacks food, fire, and friends. If you will not work you cannot eat."

That night Bill went supperless to bed.

He was brisk enough in the morning, swept the hearth, and set the porridge bowls without a word.

William then explained to him in simple form the relations between labour and payment in money or kind, coupled with the injunction to Adam, "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread." And Bill took the lesson to heart. He obeyed orders, did the work assigned him, and as time went by found he had not a hard taskmaster. William Hutton remembered his own painful childhood, and Bill derived the benefit.

But daily ablution was not more to Bill's liking than work. Long a stranger to cleanliness, he neither felt the degradation nor discomfort of dirt. He could appreciate the comfort of his new surroundings, but shrank and protested against the personal application of soap and water.

William corrected that in characteristic fashion. Mrs. Field had been gone about ten days when he called Bill to task for being unwashed.

"Eh, sir, I warr washed o' Sunday!"

"We don't wash here by the almanac.

Give yourself a good sousing directly; and every day."

"I shanno," muttered the lad—and he did not. In the morning Bill found his old rags by the side of his bed, in place of the new clothes put off overnight.

"What's gone wi' my new clothes?" he cried in dismay.

"Those are your clothes, the others are mine. They are too good to cover dirt. Rags and dirt go together. You will wear your rags until you cleanse your skin."

"I shanno!" burst from the boy defiantly. "Not if yow thresh me!"

"We shall see," was all the rejoinder of William, who went downstairs, leaving the lad standing in his shirt by the side of the pallet bed placed for his use in a small room adjoining his master's.

William lit his fire, set to work, got his breakfast, opened his shop, dusted, and set it in order, served his customers, and at noon secured the door and went to his dinner with Mr. Grace as usual.

There was no sign of the boy on his return, and Mr. Hutton made no overtures.

He was chatting over his counter to a sentimental young lady who was in ecstasies over the "purity and morality of Mr. Richardson's delicious novel, 'Pamela,'" the fourth

volume of which she had brought back to exchange for the first of "Mr. Fielding's new novel 'Amelia,'" when his attention was caught by an extraordinary sound of pumping and splashing which came through an open window and doors ajar.

His fair subscriber was followed by a man wanting a sheet of writing paper, a pen, and a wafer. When he had departed William walked into the inner room to find Vill standing there barefooted and in his shirt, with clean limbs and hair all wet and shining. It was a sultry day in August, so there was no danger of cold.

Mr. Hutton did not wait for him to speak. "Ah! You are ready for your clothes, I perceive."

"Aye, sir," said Vill, in a tone anything but brisk.

"And for your breakfast."

"Aye, sir," and Vill looked dubiously askance, wondering if either would be forthcoming.

The impounded garments, stockings and shoes included, were handed to him, and presently a handsome lad, whose fair skin was somewhat darkened by long neglect, was ready for the cold porridge which had been kept for him so many hungry hours.

Nothing more was said, but this second lesson was not lost.

Soon after this the bookbinder endeavoured to make his young apprentice useful in stitching and stringing the folded sheets, or in running short errands. Vill liked the errands best and loitered by the way.

When he returned on one occasion after an immoderate absence, William Hutton took from its nail the silver-headed cane which had been Mr. Webb's, and was in special regard, having first led the boy by the shoulder into the back room.

"Please, sir, I won't——" began Vill, with a glance of apprehension on the stout bamboo.

"You see this cane!" said Mr. Hutton, somewhat unnecessarily. "It is neither so thick nor so heavy as the stick I was beaten with when I was an apprentice, and less than you, Vill—beaten until I was sore and bleeding, and there was no one to stop or hinder the overman who did it. If I were to thrash you with this cane until you could not stir, no one would or could prevent me. You are my apprentice, and if you do not work to the best of your ability I have the right either to punish you myself or send you to gaol to be beaten there. Now, which shall I do?"

The boy, who had shared the terrors of his elders, could not hear the word "gaol" without

a shudder. At once he looked up, and said, unflinchingly, "Oh, don't send me to gaol, beat me yourself, sir."

"No," said his master. "Beating is for dogs, not for boys. I would rather treat you kindly, Vill; but the apprentice must work, the master must be obeyed. If after this you require correction, you will have to put on your old rags and go begging again. So remember."

"Oh, sir," cried Vill, "I'd rather you'd beat me black an' blue than that."

"I would rather do neither," was the answer, as the cane went back to its nail, having done its symbolic duty.

The threat was successful. Not that Vill became a model boy all at once, but he was bright, sharp, and intelligent; appreciated the comforts he enjoyed and the approval of his considerate master. He had, however, one great drawback as a bookseller's apprentice—he could not read.

William Hutton had certainly cut out work for himself when he took charge of Vill. But always alive to his own interest, and full of pity for those to whom books were blank, he set himself to remedy the obvious deficiency as speedily as might be.

The means were at hand, and Vill, who seemed to have some dim recollection of a

battledore and the characters upon it, soon picked up his alphabet, that first and most difficult step in the whole "ladder of learning," picked it up not as something new, but as a something chased through the fading vista of memory.

Behold the lad with battledore or book before him standing by his attentive master's side, the while he adjusts the folded sheets of a book under his press, and pulls the lever that acts upon the screw. He is a slim strip of a lad with light brown curly hair, and dark clear fearless eyes, set well beneath finely arched brows, a broad fair forehead, a firmly closed mouth for a child, a nose already shaping towards the aquiline, and in his outward array the picture of a miniature man. His fustian breeches, dark blue worsted hose, waistcoat coming far below his waist, and coat of dark-grey frieze, with deep cuffs, and tails descending to his knees, even his strong shoes fastened with brass latchets in lieu of buckles, had all their representatives on full-grown forms in the streets of the town; but the features of the boy were exceptional.

He was far from a dullard; his aptitude repaid his teacher; and under the influence of judicious kindness, his best qualities of mind and body were developing.

Mrs. Field, coming at intervals to renew her

small store, marked his improvement, and invoked blessings on the head of the boy's and her own benefactor, though little thought she her own heedless words as a girl had helped to make him such.

"Yow are savin' th' lad from ruin, Mr. Hutton, that yow are. Pray God Field doesn't come across un! I sometimes quake wi' fear lest I shouldn fa' into his clutches agen. An' oh, sir, if ever I didno come back to pay yow fair an' honest, an' fill my basket o'er again, dunnot yow think hardly on me. Yow may be sure I'm oather dead or daur no come."

If she did not come some one else came—some one else whose coming had been long looked for, and whose arrival was to work a marvellous change.

CHAPTER IV.

A SWEET FRIEND.

The skies over Birmingham were bluer and clearer even in November in the middle of the last century than now at midsummer. There were no giant furnaces to belch forth smoke and obscure the heavens; the clink of hammers might be heard, there being no ceaseless roll of vehicles and tramp of feet to deaden sound, but the forges were comparatively few and insignificant. Boulton and Watt had not yet shaken hands as a preliminary to shaking the world and revolutionizing manufacture. If this was true of the hardware centre, how much truer must it have been of the open country between town and town, or of towns themselves where the water wheel was the only mechanical power? So, although November had shown his clouded face, farmer Cox was not unmindful of his daughter's comfort, when, instead of consigning her like a bale of goods to the carrier's waggon for uneasy conveyance to Birmingham among boxes and baskets, which were apt to

shift and poke uncomfortable corners against back, or sides, or elbows, he preferred to mount her on his own horse behind himself on a softly padded pillion with rests alike for back and feet. The roads had not yet become impassable sloughs of mud and mire, the sky might be cloudy but the barometer prognosticated fair weather, and so did Moore's Almanac; or if rain should fall before they reached their journey's end had she not the protection of an oilskin cape and hood.

It was altogether better and more seemly that the father himself should consign his dainty darling of a daughter to her uncle's care, and if the thrifty farmer had not found a more convenient season for the fulfilment of his promise, it was because he had not hitherto seen a chance of utilizing his journey to his own profit. He had samples with him now of corn to sell. Francis Grace had been duly apprised of her coming, preparations had been made for her reception, and of course William Hutton was prepared for her arrival.

On Thursday, the very busiest day in the week, being market-day, farmer Cox piloted his horse through the crowded Beast Market —where the cattle stood in rows, flank to flank, with their horned heads resting on the elevated footways—to his brother's door about

eleven in the morning, when the stalls and shambles were all set in order and business was at its briskest. At that very moment William Hutton was standing on his own steps looking out, an ox having broken from a drove and careering down the Bull Ring, past the Old Cross chased by the herdsman, swerved aside from the shambles and was making havoc among the Staffordshire crockery on the pavement near the Corn Cheaping.

Of course there was an uproar, and although farmer Cox's steed had carried double over thirty-six miles that morning, the general stampede, the rushing and shouting disturbed the nerves of the orderly animal, and he was on the point of bolting likewise.

A man caught it by the bridle and William darted forward to lift the young lady from her no longer easy pillion.

Goodness! how light was her weight! How small and child-like the hooded figure that stood for a moment beside him! How sweet was the voice which said, "I thank thee, friend," ere she turned to salute the uncle who awaited her in his own doorway.

William Hutton went back to his business recalling the day when the same sweet voice had thanked him for the preservation of her best hat; well pleased to reflect that the change in himself set recognition at defiance.

He had not attained that height at which it became pleasant to look back on his disreputable tramp.

At noon, when he went as usual to dine at the stockinger's, leaving Vill (whose dinner came afterwards) to take charge of his shop, and if necessary to run and say he was "wanted," there was a formal introduction to farmer Cox, and Sarah Cox likewise, and then William's surprise was intensified, so small and fairy-like was the golden-haired maiden who acknowledged his salutation with so sedate a courtesy.

Never had he seen so perfect a combination of the child and the woman. In figure the former, in manner and bearing the latter.

But a tradesman's dinner on market-day was a hasty affair even in slow-going times, and William had little leisure for observation then.

Ample were his opportunities afterwards. He was first struck with the gradual change she wrought in her uncle's household: the precision and orderliness with which everything was managed; the neatness and scrupulous cleanliness of rooms and table, the whiteness of the napery, the polish on knives and silver spoons, and then contrasted all with his own disorderly bachelor home not too complacently. Along with the chest

containing the dainty young lady's wardrobe the carrier had conveyed a spinning-wheel, and if by chance William popped in after business hours he was almost sure to find Sarah Cox seated at her buzzing wheel.

At such times his thoughts were apt to wander to his sister Catherine, with whom he had not had much communication since she left him in displeasure, and as a matter of course to Susannah also. And doing so was not with any compunctious visiting, but with mental congratulations that he had for once resisted the imperative will of his sister and not succumbed to the too apparent infatuation of simple-minded Miss Finch. Why he rejoiced he did not think to ask himself.

It could not be in consequence of any attraction exhibited by Miss Cox towards himself. Indeed, there were times when he was convinced that she positively disliked him. Not that she said it in so many words, but because she said no more to him than common civility demanded, and seemed rather to hold aloof than accept the slightest attention.

So different had been the girls with whom he had come in contact, not alone Dolly Parker and Susannah Finch, but young ladies who came to change books at his library and stood to chat over his counter, that his personal

vanity was piqued. If she did enter into conversation it was always when her uncle was present; then her remarks were clear and pertinent, and marked by none of the giggling affectation or frivolity shown by some of his feminine subscribers.

It was somewhat mortifying to find that the most sensible young lady of his acquaintance took the least notice of him. Nay, even little Vill, who, also by arrangement, dined in the kitchen of Mr. Grace with his apprentices when the master's meal was over, seemed more in favour than himself.

Detecting the boy in a falsehood to screen a fault, she had taken him to task, and discovering how lamentably his morals had been neglected, and that of religious training he had none, out of very pity she undertook to disperse his darkness; and was so gentle in her teaching that Vill listened in reverence, and lost his heart to her completely. The delicate purity of her features and complexion, the sweetness of her voice, the neatness of her attire impressed him the more in contradistinction to the high tones, rough manners, and general slatternliness of the only women he had known as his "mammy" and "aunt," to say nothing of the repulsiveness and brutality of the latter, Peg.

The query, "Why have you been so long

over dinner?" had one day elicited the reply, "Pretty Miss Cox was talking to me, sir. I could not come away."

"H'm! I wish she would talk to me," was the mental ejaculation. Aloud, "Ah, and pray what was she talking about?"

"She was teaching me the ten commandments, sir. She taught me 'Our Father' last week, and made me promise to say it every night."

"And have you done so, Vill?"

"Oh, aye, sir. You know, I must keep my word."

"To sure, Vill. I hope you are grateful to Miss Cox for the pains she takes with you. You may think yourself fortunate."

"Aye, sir, and I love her, oh, so much, she is so kind."

"I wish I found her so!" thought the boy's master. "I am surely worthy as much attention as this 'prentice lad. But women's whims are neither to be gauged nor counted."

We need scarcely say that William Hutton stood on pretty good terms with himself. His rapid rise had impressed him so much with the improvement in his own manner and personal appearance, that the man of thirty, contrasting himself with himself at eighteen or twenty, expected those with whom he came into contact to be equally impressed with his

good looks, his learning, his poetry, his agreeable flow of language, and his position as a tradesman.

Men of erudition and intelligence frequented his library—Baskerville and Dr. Ash among the number—and conversed with him on equal terms; Dr. Dowler and William Ryland were friendly and intimate, so was Francis Grace. He could not comprehend why the Quaker's dapper niece should keep him at such a distance. At last it occurred to him that from her rigidly correct friends in Derby, she had heard of his early escapade, and been warned to set a mark of avoidance against his name.

The very idea tended to make him awkward and abashed before her, and to widen the distance between them as weeks and months went by.

Dissatisfied with this state of things and with the state of his own dwelling, which called for something more than the cleaning down it got from Mrs. Field on her fitful visits, or the tidying up at the unskilled hands of his young apprentice, he resolved once more to venture on a housekeeper, one who might be able to take charge of his shop in case business called him forth.

At all events, a cook in his own kitchen would obviate the necessity of meals at a

neighbour's, save time if not money, and relieve Miss Cox of the presence of one she evidently found distasteful.

He had already opened a branch establishment in Bromsgrove, and bought a horse on which he could travel to and fro for the Tuesday's market, when his business proper was generally slack; and the hiring of some one to supplement his very young apprentice was a necessity, apart from any desire to be independent of his neighbours.

A housekeeper named Patience Jolly, well recommended for integrity and piety, was found, but she fell short of her master's requirements, as who would not have done, expected to be servant and shopwoman at the same time?

He had based his ideal of a housekeeper on the models of Mrs. Perkins and Miss Cox, and was disappointed to find that between kitchen and counter his puddings were spoiled and his books sold at wrong prices.

Young Vill was the gainer if Mr. Hutton was not. He was relieved from much of the drudgery about the house, to which he had an inborn antipathy, and was not allowed to forget the lessons of Miss Cox. As a righteous duty Patience set him every Sunday afternoon to spell out to her some portion of scripture, though it was literally spelling,

and she had to keep her own name well in view during the hearing; but she said to herself, "It is a sin to let a smart lad grow up like a heathen, and if master is too busy to care for the soul of his apprentice I must not be slack in my duty. That is a blessed young lady next door; I must water the good seed she has sown."

No doubt a gamesome boy would rather have run out into the fields, but Vill had ever a fear upon him of meeting his cruel father in the country lanes and meadows—a fear deepened by Dolly Field whenever she came to recruit her stock.

A year or more had gone by since she had taken to book-hawking, when she came back one day with her empty basket and told Mr. Hutton she was weary of wandering, for she went about the country in deadly fear of meeting with either her husband or Peg Harris. "More than once I hae come across th' track o' a woman wi' a hare-lip and cross-eyes, dressed haulf like a mon in a josey and a slouch hat, an' I knew well it warr shu, an' that Field warr not far away. I hae been to Charnwood, an' found th' old place goin' to wrack an' ruin. I found my old cushion a' covered wi' blue mould, an' th' pins o' green wi' vardigrease, but I got th' bobbins, and can make a cushion fur mysen, an' I mun try

to draw a pattern as I remember, an' take up my old trade i' th' old place."

"Ah," said William, rubbing his hands together softly, "I think I can do something for you better than that. I have a small shop in Bromsgrove. I can only open it once a week. If you would go there and attend to it, I would pay you for your trouble. It would be a shelter as safe as any other. There you might carry on your lace trade in addition, and keep the place open all the week."

Dolly, now in her thirtieth year, had contrived to clothe herself decently for her calling, but few traces of her early prettiness remained. She was commended to the care of Patience Jolly as the mother of Vill, but though she was loud in her praise of Mr. Hutton, and bade Vill honour and respect him, setting him forth as a bright exemplar, she dropped no hint of their former relations, or of her own mistaken boldness in early life, but left Patience in the belief that only the natural benevolence of the man prompted her master's kindness to Mrs. Field and her boy, and evoked the poor woman's gratitude.

Mr. Hutton himself must have held something of the same opinion of his own motives when he talked over his intention to Mr. Grace,

and (after he had seen her off by the carrier's waggon, along with a parcel of goods which thereby went as luggage) acquainted his friends, Dr. Dowler and William Ryland, with what he had done "for the poor mother of his apprentice."

But he rubbed his hands together, with the satisfactory feeling that in serving Dolly Field he was also serving himself. His shop when open for six days would surely return more than when only open one, the rent would be the same, and Dolly's payment come out of extra profits.

Somehow, after this, he thought Miss Cox looked differently on him, that her shyness and reserve was melting. He no longer worked or studied incessantly. When business was over he sometimes took a stroll about the town, with Vill by the hand, to make the lad acquainted with the thoroughfares, as well as for exercise, giving him many a useful lesson by the way. Or he stepped into his neighbour's back parlour for a little trade or political gossip, sure to find Miss Cox either at her wheel or a wonderful patchwork quilt she was contriving out of Indian chintz; the latter, a sort of appliqué, where flowers cut from the original chintz were rearranged and sewed with a fancy-stitch on stout white dimity, or dimothy as it was then called.

Either wheel or quilt was certain to introduce some remark about his sister Catherine, to which the golden-haired worker was willing to listen or respond, and sometimes she took the initiative with questions anent the progress of Vill, but all with so little self-consciousness, and such maidenly sedateness, as filled him with new ideas of womankind and set the extinguished cinder in his breast all aglow again.

Francis Grace was at any hour ready to welcome his familiar neighbour, who could enter into all the details of the stocking trade grievances and difficulties, and whose personal rivalry he had no occasion to dread; and if William dropped in at the "Golden Stocking" more frequently as the year rounded, he had no suspicion that that or any other golden stocking was in danger of a raid upon it.

CHAPTER V.

AT THE SIGN OF THE "GOLDEN STOCKING."

William Hutton's guineas were not kept in a stocking-foot, but in a stout canvas bag, locked in the old desk; and as he added to them week by week, it was still his wont to pour out the golden heaps, and count them out in piles of five or ten, like draughtsmen on a board. But not merely to feast his eyes as formerly; a new element had come into his life: he watched the increase as a means, not an end.

Michaelmas day had also come, and was followed by a goose from Nottingham as a reminder of relations who imagined themselves forgotten and of the Goose Fair at which it had been bought. It also took out of town Mr. Grace, mounted on Mr. Hutton's steady-going roadster, his object being to buy hops at Worcester, for the home-brewing, then the province of the good housewife, a brewhouse being an essential adjunct to every respectable residence. In Birmingham the separate scullery still retains the name.

Evening set in and deepened. William put up his shutters, an apprentice came out to close those of Mr. Grace. The hosier himself had not returned. The golden head of Sarah Cox, or as much as her close cambric cap did not hide, was visible at the door, looking anxiously down the almost deserted Bull Ring.

William, anxious too, alike on account of his friend and of his horse, spoke to her and expressed a "hope that her uncle would be home ere night closed in."

The doors of the two shops adjoined. He stood upon his own steps leaning against the jamb; she, neatly and quaintly attired in gray calimanco, with elbow ruffles and kerchief of delicate lawn, stood out upon the next, evidently in great perturbation.

Never before had she appeared so willing to converse. Her fears made her feel the need of a companion; and if the conversation seemed at all likely to flag she was ready to renew it, though the topic was still the same —the danger of the roads.

"I understand thou hast been a great traveller, sir," she advanced during one of these breaks.

"Not a very great traveller, madam, yet it hath fallen to my lot to journey between Nottingham and this town twice or thrice, and likewise to London and back, also on foot.

For several months I had a business in Southwell, which gave me a weekly journey from Nottingham through the forest. The occasional walk to Derby for a holiday is scarcely worth mention."

"Nay, then, thou hast been a traveller though thy modesty doth deny it. Met thou with many untoward adventures by the way?"

"Aye, madam. Every traveller doth. I have been attacked by deer-stealers in Sherwood Forest, and benighted in Charnwood, where my life was in imminent peril. But the most momentous of my adventures was when, a lad of seventeen years, I was robbed of my travelling bags and left with but a few pence and old clothes, to find my way to Derby, a forlorn, miserable being. There in my melancholy I chanced to wander by a meandering brook, and overtook a fair little damsel swinging a straw hat by the strings as she tripped along. The wind was rude and tore away the pretty maiden's hat. It was my good hap to restore it. But the golden-haired maiden proved the greatest thief of all, for I verily believe she stole my heart that day."

At the mention of her hat she looked up in doubt and amazement. His closing words were ignored.

"Thou?" Then she laughed merrily, giv-

ing a glimpse of pearly teeth in even rows; "Grandmother took thee for a beggar!"

"And you, Miss Cox, considered I was as 'civil as a gentleman.' You perceive I have not forgotten." And closer he bent his head as he spoke, all unaware that Vill was almost at his elbow on the topmost step.

"How didst——?" She broke off short as the clock of the Old Cross began to strike nine, and, when the last stroke was told, in alarm went on, "Hath not the night grown dark? And how late is the hour! Surely some mishap hath befallen——"

At that moment the regular beat of a horse's hoofs was heard in the stillness coming past the church and up the hill. Then out of the night-shadows loomed a darker shadow, to take form ere it came to a stop in the faint and flickering light raying out from the two open doors.

Vill was already down the steps to hold the horse's bridle.

"Oh! Uncle, thou art here at last, we were sorely afraid——"

William had stepped forward to help the old man to dismount, but he had quick ears for the significant "we."

"And so was I afraid, Sally," began Mr. Grace. "I've been a quaker to-night if never in my life before. I have been in mortal

dread, and much I fear blood hath been shed in my behoof. Nay, I myself have been provoked to deal a blow—but send thy 'prentice over to the 'Garland' with thy beast, friend Hutton, and come thou within doors. Hark thee, lad!" (to Vill who was leading the jaded animal to the inn stables across the road) "See that the ostler giveth the horse an extra feed, and doth rub him well down for the night, and there's a penny for thee. Ah, Sally, do thou thank God this night thy old uncle hath come home to thee at all; so many evil men lie in wait to spoil the wayfarer!"

The pocket of hops he had purchased had been already unstrapped from the back of the steed, and landed beside the buyer's counter by his neighbour, who secured his own half-door, gave a call to Patience to keep her alert, and was in a few minutes in the hosier's back parlour, where an ample supper had been set forth with appetizing nicety in readiness for the traveller. Not with any display of glass or china; the dishes and platters were of pewter, and there were horns for the ale; but the pewter shone almost as brightly as the silver rims of the drinking-horns, or the silver table-spoons, and moreover the knives and two-pronged steel forks had a polish anything but common. Then on the fair white table-

cloth was never a spot or stain, no ashes littered the hearth or choked the grate where burned a cheerful fire of Staffordshire coal to beam a welcome, and repeat it in the brass andirons, and every other polished article from the tall oak chairs to the squat brass candlesticks in which two mould candles stood thriftily unlighted until required, with the brass snuffers and tray between them.

The viands were nothing special, only a goodly chicken-pie and about half a ham, flanked by the remains of a Markeaton cheese, and a loaf of brown bread, but all partook of the neatness and daintiness of the young housekeeper who stood on tip-toe to relieve her uncle of his riding-coat and carry it away.

There was nothing unusual about the table or the room even to William Hutton, but somehow, as his eye took in all the details at a glance, the precision and cheeriness struck him as never before. He was struck too with the self-command of the niece who, repressing her own curiosity and anxiety, insisted that her good uncle should sup before he entered on an exciting topic.

"Whatever hath happened, Uncle Grace, thou art now safe. Thee wilt only excite thyself by talking before thou hast overcome thy hunger and fatigue. I am not unregard-

ful, but I see thou hast been greatly overcome."

"Aye, Sally, well-nigh ; but thou art right. Take thy seat, friend Hutton, my tale will keep," and with a hand not too steady he lifted a horn of ale to his lips, and drained it.

Francis Grace had thrown out hints to whet the appetite for such a tale as he might have to tell, if not for the supper, for surely Sarah Cox had lost hers completely, and sat there alternately red and pale, as an interested listener well might be, even before her uncle finished his meal and began to account for his disordered attire and manner.

"Thee knows, friend Hutton, I like to kill two birds with one stone ; and as hath been my practice, I carried parcels of hose for my good customers in Worcester in my saddle-bags this morning, if I brought only hops back to-night. One of my customers in the High Street had not the full tale of cash ready, I had to call again; another, a mercer in the Tything, was away at a funeral. I did not see him until my hops were bought and I was ready to return home. That made me late, and my company was already on the road. Then thy horse cast a shoe. I confess I chafed at the delay, but humanity forbade the laming of the beast to repair my own dilatoriness. We went on slowly until a

roadside blacksmith reshod the patient animal. I might have taken a lesson from the dumb beast, for there's no gainsaying I have a short temper"

There was the flicker of a smile on the faces of both his auditors at this undeniable truth.

"Ah, ye may smile," he went on, "but it would try thy temper, friend Hutton, to be left behind by a party thou hadst no chance of overtaking, with a long and lonesome journey before thee along ill-conditioned roads, broken and miry, with the twilight coming over the earth like a shroud Fortunately thy horse was surefooted, and I kept a keen look-out when voices greeted me out of the gathering mist; for a full purse is a heavy care, and thee knows I am not a fighting man. The last labourer had gone to his bed long ere I approached Edgbaston Park, and I had need to ride circumspectly, the Bourne Brook crosseth and recrosseth the roadway thereabouts so frequently. Just a glimmer, then a splash, splash telleth the rider that his horse is over fetlocks in water, and that a loose stone or a stumble meaneth a ducking. I congratulated myself on having crossed the brook for the last time, and was calculating how long it would take Smiler to cover the three miles lying between us and the supper awaiting both, when I observed a

dark seated figure by the wayside and heard a woman sobbing piteously."

"Well," exclaimed both his hearers in a breath, bending eagerly forward.

"I wish it had been well. I checked my horse, inquired, 'What aileth thee?' when the figure uprose, drew near to me, and with a pitiful tale of destitution begged relief. Foolishly incautious I unbuttoned my top-coat and dived into my breeches' pocket for six-pence. Before I could draw it forth, I saw a gleam of strong white teeth strangely bare, felt a tug at my chain, and my watch was gone."

"Gone?" from both.

"Aye, verily, gone! And I had well-nigh gone, too, for at that instant a man darted from behind a bush and sprang upon me, a tall powerful fellow who clutched at the breast of my half-open coat either to drag me from my seat or to abstract my pocket-book. It behoved me to resist the evil-doers, and I strove to free myself and give the rein to Smiler. But the robber was a giant and the woman held the horse with the grip of a man, though the good beast swerved and pranced to free us both. The son of Belial had as firm a hold on me. I was a reed in his grasp, I felt myself going. At that critical moment there was a sharp report, the whiz of a bullet

—the man's arm dropped disabled, he cried 'Curse my ill-luck! Clear off, Peg!' and was gone before the horseman who had come up over the soft ground unheard could draw a second pistol from his holster. If I had almost lost my seat I had quite lost my temper, and as the woman let the bridle go, I gave her in my wrath a smart cut across the face with my riding whip. Much I fear I hurt her grievously, for she uttered an awful yell and staggered, ere she dashed away after her companion."

Very white had Sarah Cox grown during this recital, even to the lips held somewhat apart.

She had crept near to her uncle. Now with her hand upon his arm she asked in a tremor, "Thee did not pursue them?"

Very different was the excited query of his other hearer,

"Surely the woman did not get clear off with your watch?"

"Aye, friend Hutton, she did. They had chosen a likely covert for their unholy work: close under the shade of a thick copse on the confines of the park, where horsemen could not follow, and men on foot would be led astray. We judged it better to let them go. The old silver watch had cost them dear."

"And what of thy deliverer, dear uncle?" asked his niece.

"He bore me company to Dudley Street, where our roads divided. He was a Nottinghamshire squire named West, and was on his way from Carew Mount to Baskerville's new house on Easy Hill. He seemed better pleased to let the rogues escape than I was. He said the man's long legs and voice reminded him of a scoundrel whose father he had known and respected. For the father's sake he should not care to bring the son to justice. He was not otherwise communicative."

"Your pocket-book was safe, sir, I hope?"

"Oh, aye, and I am safe in life and limb, thank God! but I am much shaken, and so will say good night, friend Hutton."

"Peg, and a long-legged man, whose father was respected by Squire West! That points to Francis Field. I must keep Vill indoors if they are prowling about. And I must put Mrs. Field on her guard," said Mr. Hutton to himself, as he turned into his own premises. "If Mr. Grace had not said 'Good-night' so abruptly I might have asked if the woman at all resembled the nurse I had when I was ill."

Morning brought the reflection that Mr. Grace's assailants were both likely to keep clear of Birmingham and its constables for a considerable time, seeing that highway robbery was a hanging matter, and they

were more or less marked. He hesitated whether he should give a clue to the identity of "Peg" and her companion, but he thought of the 'prentice-lad, who had a home under his roof, towards whom his heart had gradually expanded, and who held him both in awe and reverence. Vill was honest, full of generous impulses, surely taking more after his grandfather Field and his mother than after his wicked father. It would be cruel to blight the lad's life with the knowledge or the stigma of his father's crimes, and it would be unavoidable if Mr. Grace, set on the track of the robbers, were to bring them to justice. And then there was Dolly. The man might have been a brute to her and Vill, but he was her husband, and she might not care to see him hanged. It was not for him to stir in the matter, he would wait and hear how Mr. Grace was disposed.

Mr. Grace was not visible the next day. He was a man in advanced years, and between the shock and the struggle was very much shaken. Dr. Dowler was sent for and gave him a composing draught, but a day or two elapsed before he came down-stairs. And then the good but irritable Quaker had so many compunctious visitings anent his own act of violence, so out of keeping with his creed, that it was clear he counted his watch

a poor set-off for the injury he must have inflicted, to say nothing of the pistol-shot fired in his defence. He was quite of opinion that evil-doers should be punished, but not inclined to wag a finger to punish. "It is not for me to pursue, if the Lord hath permitted them to escape. They have suffered more damage through me than I through them. It may perchance lead them to repent."

William held a different opinion of their possible repentance, but he remained silent. He was himself a man of peace—had something of the Hutton passivity in his composition, and so long as Mr. Grace was minded to remain quiescent he saw no reason why he should turn gratuitous informer.

He lived to wish he had been less scrupulous.

The incident had, however, served to renew his intimacy with his neighbours, never broken so far as the hosier was concerned, but he had come into closer contact with Miss Cox, and found that her reserve or shyness was disappearing. He volunteered books for her perusal. The offer was not rejected. He carried in his own poems for criticism, never denied, and honestly given; if with a bias in favour of the author and the taste of the age, he was not likely to complain of any want of critical acumen. Indeed I am not

sure that her sweet approval did not invest her with superior charms. Then the interest she evinced in the young apprentice created conversation and convinced him she had a kind heart; whilst on her part she felt assured that never apprentice had at once so just and gentle a master. She knew the boy had a quick, high spirit, and chafed under rebuke, and she heard of irritating blunders he committed through carelessness, or want of better education, but she never heard the sound of blows, or any token of ill usage; and she was wont to say as a high compliment, "Thy household seemeth as quiet and decorous as a Friend's."

William's thriftiness, steadiness, and unvarying attention to business was a favourite theme with her uncle, and when, as was frequently the case, the former brought a popular or new book to read aloud while the latter smoked his pipe, and the maiden pursued her quilting or spinning, his departure was sure to herald some eulogium on the young man who spent his leisure hours in study, whilst others of his age wasted both time and money in frivolity or dissipation.

One way or other the pair were drawn together by some principle of mutual attraction, though months went by, and the nearest approach to love-making was the unique

declaration of William one evening in November, when in the midst of conversation he was for a few minutes left alone with the young lady. "Your sentiments do you honour, Miss Cox; I have rarely met with a feminine mind so strongly in accord with my own, and I do perceive a growing affection for you in my breast which I shall take no pains to check."

It was somewhat patronizing and self-assured, but though the young lady coloured to her temples, she uttered no rebuke. Neither did she giggle or put on any airs of affectation. If her eyelids fell, she heard him in silence, perchance weighing his words with himself, but the return of Mr. Grace barred nearer approach to an understanding if even the prudent admirer had been prepared to make it.

However, the ice was broken, distant friendship took a warmer tone, there was no demonstration of ardent passion on either side, —whatever there was William threw into verse—but "Madam" became "Sarah," then "Sally"; "Friend Hutton" became "Friend William," then "William"; hands lingered longer together at meeting or parting, there was a whispered "my dear," there were looks and glances, and finally the master of the "Golden Stocking" awoke to the fact that a

raid on somebody's golden stocking was not only possible but in contemplation.

The pair of strongly attached but undemonstrative lovers had reckoned without their host. Mr. Grace was anything but gracious.

CHAPTER VI.

DOLLY'S DISCLOSURE.

William Hutton's love-fever had begun and ended with Dolly Parker. Wonderfully susceptible was he to feminine influence, and many had been the webs woven for his entanglement—for which no doubt he had furnished material, since all women have not the faculty of the spider—but he had grown wary and suspicious, was ever on the watch for flaws, and his warmth cooled the moment he fancied a premature readiness to take his involuntary attentions as an earnest of sober matrimony. As is frequently the case, he scanned other women through the microscope Dolly Parker had supplied, and they paid the penalty of her shortcomings. Susannah Finch was by no means Dolly Parker's immediate successor, and the dapper little maiden who kept her uncle's house so cleverly and discreetly was far from the first on whom the Birmingham bookseller had cast glances of admiration over the counter, at the Meeting House, and elsewhere. Indeed, so tardy had been his full appreciation of Miss

Cox's many virtues, so slow of development the affection he had conceived for her, that a special flame had been kindled and *extinguished* between the November in which Sally Cox alighted from her pillion under shadow of the "Golden Stocking," and that other November in which he began his peculiar wooing.

The sober man who has by any chance come into contact chiefly with the bold and forward of the opposite sex is sure to be the most scrupulous in regard to the delicacy and purity of the woman he marries, whatever licence he may have given himself. It is only the besotted voluptuary who dares profane the sanctities of married life, and bring possible disgrace on himself and his posterity by alliance with beauty unaccompanied by modesty and prudence. Wit may attract, and art may captivate, but the man of sense or refinement is rarely to be caught by one who would "unsought be won." He may admire, flatter either by word or homage, but if she but advance a single step before he gives the word, such a man who has known woman at her worst (whether innocently or otherwise), retires repelled, and it may be in his very nicety of choice remains for life a bachelor.

William's own mother had died when he was too young to retain more than a memory of a good, hard-working woman who gave her life a

sacrifice to her children and to their indolent, intemperate father. The severe money-making aunts at Swithland, the pinching sharp-tongued wife of his uncle George, the untaught, untrained working-lasses, free of speech and manner, who associated with himself and his fellow apprentices in unabashed familiarity, had not been fair samples of womankind, yet had they given his mind a bias.

Against them stood out in relief his sister Catherine, as a bright particular star. With such a woman for a sister he could not doubt the possibility of such another for a wife, notwithstanding the grossness and immorality prevailing in all ranks of society. But it had so happened that no sooner had he singled out an acquaintance as "suitable," and shown a desire to cultivate a preliminary friendship, than some chance word, some indiscreet attempt to precipitate a proposal, had chilled the rising warmth in his prudent breast, and his "Good-bye" had been final.

It had been so with his opposite neighbour in Bromsgrove, and he was not sorry that Mrs. Field's presence obviated the necessity for riding thither once a week as heretofore, especially when he had found in reality what he had hitherto sought in vain.

Therefore it was he looked taken aback when he opened a letter from Bromsgrove one

Friday morning—for the delivery of which he had paid a half-penny fee in excess of postage —and glanced hastily at the superscription and signature.

Was the father of the young lady to whom he had so nearly committed himself about to call him to account?

Nay, it was a friendly communication, and ran thus:

"Bromsgrove, Feby. 20th, 1755.

"Sir,—I write to inform you that your shop is closed. Your shopwoman came here at noon to-day, seemingly agitated and in trouble, and left me with a sum of money which she said belonged to you, and the key. She said she was tired of shopkeeping. She was afraid of being robbed and murdered living alone, and was about to start for London where there were fine ladies to buy her lace. She desired me to give her humble duty to you, and if you never saw her again you was not to think her ungrateful. Will you please come and relieve me of my charge. I shall put my son's bull-dog in the shop to-night. So no more from

"Yours to command,

"E. Tilt."

This was anything but a composing missive. William Hutton was at once bewildered and dismayed. The sudden flight of Mrs. Field

gave rise to curious conjectures. He must set off at once. Yet he was exceptionally busy; had no one to leave in his place but Patience and Vill, and of the two the sharp lad was more to be relied on, though he could not be more than ten years of age, and Patience was forty. He had, however, learned to read, and that was a great gain to his master.

William looked out. "The day is gloomy and threatening; the weather-cock on the Old Cross is in a rainy quarter. I do not relish the journey, but I am neither sugar nor salt, I shall not melt in a shower, and there must be something done. I had best go. Vill!" —to the lad, who was instantly on the alert— "Hie thee to the 'Garland,' and bid the hostler saddle Smiler and bring him hither quickly."

He made a few simple business arrangements, stepped into his neighbour's to say he had been suddenly called to his other shop, examined the priming of his pistols, hurried on topcoat, riding boots and spurs and had one foot in the stirrup to mount, when he saw a woman with a large bundle toiling up the Bull Ring as if coming Digbeth way, and paused with his hand on the saddle, watching her as she came slowly on, notwithstanding his own haste.

What was there about the woman to justify this delay?

All at once Vill clapped his hands and cried, "Here's mother!" (Patience had taught him it was babyish to say mammy.)

William withdrew his foot from the stirrup and awaited her slow coming. "Here, Vill, hold the horse, and tell your mother to follow me in," he cried as she drew near.

"What is the meaning of this?" he began, as she entered the shop, but she appeared so weary, so spiritless, he stopped short, and turning to Patience who stood behind the counter said, "Bring Mrs. Field a horn of ale, she is exhausted."

Shops were not furnished with chairs in the last century. "You had better come in to the house, Mrs. Field, and rest," he said kindly, relieving her of her bundle, and ushered her in, having first bade Vill "Take Smiler back to the stable. He must not be unsaddled."

The draught of ale seemed to revive her. "I han been on my feet since daybreak," she explained as she set down the empty horn. But she declined the offer of food. "Not yet," she said, "yow are in haste, and I munna keep yow too long. But I've summat to tell as must be telled."

Patience had already retired to the shop, and was changing a book for a subscriber.

"Han you heard from Mester Tilt?"

William nodded an affirmative. "Well, I tell'd him I wur off to Lunnon, and I tell'd other folk t' same o' purpose. That warr o' Tuesday, an' I got a lift in a market-cart as warr going towards Redditch, wheer they make th' needles. I axed th' farmer th' road to Lunnon, an' he said through Auster,* and set me down when th' road torned off. It warr neet when I got to Auster, but I got a bed at the public house, an' theer too I said I warr goin' to Lunnon, an' axed a' th' roads. I went on as if I warr bound theere; and two or three mile further, at th' back o' a barn changed th' gown I had on, tied a bright handkercher o'er my bonnet, an' then I torned back looking like another woman, wi' a bundle i'stead o' a basket, an' come reet through Auster, wi' my face torned thisns."

"But why all this precaution?" demanded William, much puzzled.

"Mester Hutton. I warr afraid o' bein' followed, an' thatn would be noather good fur yow nor me. I warr sitting i' th' shop o' Tuesday, wi' my cushion on my knee at wark, waiting fur customers, an' thinking o' th' time when I warr a lass an' sat at my father's door i' Woolpack Lane singin' o'er my wark, when first th' winder an' then th' door warr dark-

*Alcester.

ened. I looked up, thinking it warr some one to buy summat, an' oh! how my heart torned! Theer stood Peg wi' a bandage o'er one eye, in the great long coat they calls a josey, and shu just looked awful. 'So, yow're snug an' comfortable here, Mrs. What's-your-name,' she sneered, and torned her head up to read th' sign. 'Mebbe yow've some cash to spare fur th' old friends yow left for new uns'.' My spirit warr up, an' I answered, 'No, I hanno. Whatn's here belungs to other folk. I'm workin' fur an honest livin' an' I wantn none o' yow here. Yow han been th' ruin o' Francis, but yow shanna be th' ruin o' me!' Then shu brot her ugly face close to mine an' grinned an' said, 'Dunno yow crow too soon, my fine bird. Yow may sing to another tune afore long. Gie me some money or I'll tak it. Francis an' me's starvin'. An' wheer's th' lad?'

"I put my hand in my pocket an' gied her hauf-a-crown, an' telled her it warr a' I had o' my own. Shu clutched it, as if shu hadna seen a hauf-crown afore, an' then snatched a piece o' lace hangin' up to sell, an' a book, an' warr off afore I could stop her. I hanno got o'er the fright yet."

"And so you ran away to avoid Peg Harris? Do you know why she had her face bandaged?"

Dolly shook her head.

"*I* imagine a blow from a riding-whip either injured her sight or laid open her cheek," said he, with a short nod.

"Yow didno do it?" put in Mrs. Field, excitedly. "If yow didn, sure's a gun yow'll rue it."

"No, I only heard of it. I heard a man was hurt at the same time. Circumstances pointed to your husband."

"Aye, I caught a glimpse of him, with his arm in a sling, slinkin' round a corner, when I went, all of a shake, to Mr. Tilt's. I knew it warr th' sign o' summat they'd done amiss. I hope yow dunno blame me for runnin away, Mester Hutton. 'Twor th' only way to save mysen, and to save yor property. I'd been fairly comfortable theer, an' now it's all o'er. I mun go away wheer my lace cushion will keep me. I am sorry, sir. I couldna stay i' th' shop an' face them. I warr scared."

"Dishonest connections are not alluring," he observed. "You are not to blame for fleeing from yours. They are likely to be baffled. I do not design to open the shop again. A trustworthy deputy is hard to find, and it pays me best to remain here. But whither are you bound?"

"Dunno ax me, sir, I wantn to leave no trace. But——" and here her voice sank to an

emotional and confidential whisper, as she bent forward—"yow han been so kind I conna goo wieout tellin' yow th' whole truth, promise or no promise—*Bill's no child o' mine, nor o' Field's noather.*"

Her interlocutor raised his head in blank astonishment. "Then whose lad is he?"

"That I dunno know, sir. He hadno been in our place more nor six weeks when yow came. Peg brot him wi' her, an' I heeard her an' Field whispering together, but they never talked plain, an' there were nods and signs fur th' names o' people an' places. I caught th' words 'ba,' an' 'gate,' an' 'cloak,' and heered Peg say reet out, 'I've wrung theer hearts if I hanno wrung the brat's neck, an' so we han paid them out,' an' I thot shu mun mean th' same folk as shu warr threatenin' afore. I warr fair struck dumb, but I daur na say a word, Peg had such a hold on Field. I axed him once whose child th' lad warr, but he scowled at me till his black brows met, and shouted 'Ours, i' such a tone I warr fit to sink."

"Poor Dolly!" said William, compassionately, "where was your old spirit gone?"

"Where was yow're spirit gone when yow ran away from yow're uncle's? Starved out, licked out! Vill—he said his name wasn't Bill—he had a rare spirit till it warr banged

and kicked out on him. When Peg's faither warr hanged an' Ben transported, shu swore th' lad should hang some day as high as her faither; but it warr not till my own lad died, an' I knew his mother's heart would be achin' fur him as I made up my mind to save him, fur he warr a good lad. And he mun ha' belonged to gentlefolk, for sithee, here's th' outside o' th' catch-a-ba he brot wi' him. It wor fine an' new then. He an' Franky fowt fur it, as yow saw, so one day I took it from them, an' said I'd burnt it. But I emptied th' inside an' kept th' cover safe, fur Peg had bro't th' lad i' old clothes, an' there warr now't but it, an th' scar a' back o' his hand, one could show if his folk warr found. An' I mean to find 'em!"

"How came that mark on his hand," asked William curiously.

"He said 'twor done wi' a door. An' it hadno been done long fur it hadn' th' doctor's plaistrin on then."

"I hope, Mrs. Field, you have not got me into trouble over Vill. I have no business with a stolen child as an apprentice."

"Look yow. Th' lad mow't ha' starved but fur yow. An' yow tho't he wor my lad. I'd ha' telled yow th' truth afore, but yow wouldna promise to keep the secret. But it's reet yow should know, fur if Field comes an'

claims th' lad as hisn, yow can stick to him. But dunnot let Vill know till he be out on his time, or his folk turn up. It wunna do th' lad anny good, an' mow't make him lazy. An', oh, Mr. Hutton, yow're a good an' honest man, dunnot let Peg or Field get hold o' Vill, fur theyn ruin him if they dun."

William looked troubled. "You have put a serious charge into my hands, and on my conscience. I shall have to weigh it well. But console yourself, neither Field nor Peg shall lay a finger on him. I'll hang them both first. And now I must be off. Time hath flown. It wants but half an hour to noon."

Into his shop he went at the call of a customer—first locking up the remains of the ball in his desk—took an order for the supply of the *Monthly Review* and the *World* equipped for riding though he was, whilst Patience, released, put a hasty substitute for dinner upon the table.

By the end of the half-hour he was in the saddle. Messages were left for Mr. Ryland and Mr. Baskerville to apologize for absence. Mrs. Field was enjoined to await his return; and Smiler was off down the Bull Ring at a good round trot, which broke into a gallop when the sharp corner of Edgbaston Street was turned.

He had no pleasant prospect before him.

A rough ride on a dull February afternoon along a highway only repaired at long and very uncertain intervals by statute labour or half-hearted subscription, where the ruts were two feet deep and the miry slough as bad, whilst stones of all sizes lay about as stumbling-blocks for four-footed beasts, was not cheering to a traveller on an unprofitable errand. As he rode past Edgbaston Park towards the swollen Bourne, swamping the road where it flowed across in its devious course again and again, he felt uneasy in his seat—as if some robber hiding behind a bush might spring upon *him*, midday though it was.

Wild and uncultivated was the country on his right, and not being market-day the road was lonely as it was cheerless. Bushes and trees were leafless, though the rising sap was swelling into buds, and the wind whistling through the boughs of Selly Park was but a herald of a coming deluge. For now the rain came down upon him, not in a patter of successive drops, but as if Aquarius emptied his full water-pot upon his bent head in constant dashes. The wind, too, came careering wildly over the heath, scarcely broken by the scattered hamlets and habitations on his route, and ere he had crossed the Lickey hills he and Smiler had such a buffet-

ing as made the man at least long for a sight of the old "Hop-pole" inn and a warm fire.

"I have not been out in such a storm since the night I was belated in Charnwood," he said to himself. "Ah! straight paths are surest. Had I gone direct home that day instead of turning out of my course to visit relations who did not desire me, both storms might have been avoided. I'm not going on a pleasant errand now. I wish Dolly had left the money and key anywhere but at Tilt's. Old flames are best avoided. Who would have thought of meeting an old sweetheart in so wild a region as Charnwood, or of discovering in the savage who refused the shelter of his roof, at once the man she married and one of the villains who assailed me in Sherwood. Time's whirligig hath brought round changes. I faced that February storm on Charnwood waste on foot, too poor to invite robbery or bespeak a welcome from aunt or uncle. Now I am riding a horse of my own; have gold to carry and gold to keep. The Wards would be proud to receive nephew Hutton. Mr. Tilt is as eager as Mr. Finch to claim me as a son-in-law; and I look higher than either. And, stranger still, that rogue Field's wife and son are both under my roof and in my service." There was a break in his cogitations, if not in the

weather. "Stay—the lad is *not* his son! Am I justified in keeping him knowing he hath been stolen? 'Tis a hard knot to untie. Vill is growing useful, is well-mannered, doth my bidding promptly, hath proved an apt scholar, hath learned to sprinkle as well as stitch. I should miss a companion as well as an apprentice did I part with him? And wherefore should I part with him? Whither would he go? Who would feed, or clothe, or care for him? His parentage is unknown. Am I bound to seek it out? I did not steal the lad; did not know he was stolen. I am teaching him to earn an honest living and make his way in the world. It is for Dolly Field to seek out his kindred. His education shall be cared for. If she succeeds there will be thanks for me, and Vill's service till she doth. And now what is to be done with the Bromsgrove stock and the shop? I cannot spare the time to attend it even on Tuesdays; and I have no assistant I can rely on; and I'd best keep clear of Miss Tilt."

Over and over he turned the question in his mind as he breasted the storm, and when he reached the "Hop-pole" he had half resolved on advertising his shop for sale in *Aris's Gazette.*

Smiler was taken to the stables. His master went forward to the inn kitchen,

attracted by the savoury smell of fried ham and eggs ; the ready landlady helped him off with his soaking riding-coat, and hung it to dry before the blazing fire ; and whilst he sat down to a hot dinner she freely discussed the strange freak of his shopwoman's sudden flight to London as a fact patent to the town, and everybody's business.

The appetite gained in his fourteen miles' ride found so much occupation for his teeth that the silence of his tongue passed unregarded. Mrs. Field's secret was not for common gossip.

The garrulity of the landlady, however, supplied him with information he turned to account, though it was rather a shock to his self-complacence. Miss Susan Tilt had got a sweetheart. They were to be married at Easter, and Mr. Tilt had been speculating what Mr. Hutton would take for his stock-in-trade and business as it stood.

No doubt the receipts handed over to Mr. Tilt's care with Dolly's rude account thereof, had prompted the desire to buy the business for his daughter's portion. At all events he and Mr. Hutton opened the closed-up shop, examined the stock to ascertain if all was safe and correct, and the deposited cash changed hands. There was then an adjournment to Mr. Tilt's house-place, where the red-quarried

floor was scarcely redder than two pairs of cheeks. And there a bid having been made —one desirous to buy, the other to sell— a bargain was struck over a tankard of ale, the purchase money paid down on the nail, the tenancy transferred, and William carried with him to the inn a bag of guineas that made him speculate whether it would be more hazardous to ride home through the gathering dark, or wait until the sale effected had been bruited abroad.

The storm had ceased an hour, and the moon broke through flying clouds, so thinking of those at home who would be alarmed by his stay, he hurried off, giving Smiler a hint with a spur.

He reached the Bull Ring unmolested. His guineas were safe, but Dolly Field was gone.

CHAPTER VII.

MATRIMONIALLY INCLINED.

However undemonstrative a courtship may be, however cool the lover, however retiring the maiden, however gradually friendship may melt into love, some change must be perceptible to awaken the vigilance of parent or guardian not hopelessly obtuse.

Two separate admirers of Miss Cox had come riding after her from Derbyshire, one in October, one in December, both with well-lined pouches and the sanction of friends at home, and both had gone back with a quiet "Nay, verily, I cannot," for answer.

So eligible was the latter in all respects, so likely to captivate a young maid's fancy that his dismissal drove Francis Grace to put on his studying cap, and think out the reason. The natural conclusion was a prior attachment. He watched his niece, he watched the friends she met at meeting, or under his roof. His clear eyes were soon enlightened, and his temper suffered.

He rebuked her sharply.

"So, Sally, it was all for William Hutton thee sent away both the suitors approved by thy kindred! It is not seemly for a maiden to encourage a lover without the sanction of her elders. Moreover, William Hutton is not a Friend, thee cannot be allowed to enter wedlock with him. Thee must break with him or I shall be constrained to acquaint thy parents. Dost not know the man's father is an idler and a sot? Would'st ally thyself to the son of such a reprobate? What could'st thee see in William Hutton to kindle affection? He hath taken unfair advantage of his reception under my roof, in presuming to address thee, and thou hast forgotten thy duty to thy parents and to me in suffering him to court thee. And his fancy roves. He is not worthy to mate with my sister's child."

There was a family resemblance between Francis Grace and Sally Cox. If he was fiery, there was a warm spark in her breast.

She had listened to him in silence until he proclaimed her lover unworthy, the lover who had been at all times so respectful, so guarded in his manner. Then the spirit within her gave answer :

"Uncle Francis, thy passion is surely leading thee astray. When first I came to keep house for thee, there were no words too good

for praise of thy neighbour William Hutton. He was 'industrious,' 'thrifty,' 'upright,' 'temperate,' 'prudent,' 'kindly,' 'peaceable,' 'studious,' 'civil,' 'sensible,' 'intelligent;' it was through thy spectacles I beheld these worthy qualities before I had proved their verity. I held aloof from the young man until I felt that he who stood so high in thy esteem must be worthy all esteem from me. If William's father be all that thou dost say, more honour to the son who hath escaped the taint of evil example. I have done nothing unmaidenly or unbecoming a Friend, though I have pledged my word to thy friend. Prithee write to the farm, and tell my parents how thou didst admit to thy table, and commend to thy sister's child, a man unworthy to associate with her. Peradventure they will commend thy prudence and thy zeal."

He bit his lips, and failing direct reply, answered testily, "I brought thee hither, Sally, instead of taking unto myself a second wife, and before thee has been my housekeeper fifteen months thee begins to think of leaving me. I had better have married at once."

"Then it is not William Hutton's demerit, but thy inconvenience doth bar the way. Ah, uncle Francis, take thee a wife to rule

thy house, and leave Sally free to choose where her heart prompteth and thou hast led."

Uncle Francis, however, was not to be persuaded.

William and Sarah had never met in secret, and he now threw obstacles in the way of their meeting at all. And no doubt he would have forbidden his neighbour to cross his threshold had he not found him as indispensable a companion as had his niece. He was angry and repelling over night, the next day from very force of habit shook hands and talked of trade and politics as usual. But no sooner was a word breathed to place his neighbour's relations with Miss Cox on a surer footing, than the Quaker's temper rose at once.

Fortune favoured the lovers in peculiar fashion.

The hosier had a small but long-standing debt owing to him at Moseley. He desired to obtain it if possible, but did not care to venture out so far alone during the short dark days of February. His Michaelmas experience had made him timid.

He waited until March set in and then asked Mr. Hutton if he would bear him company.

It was not convenient, but William waived that, and gave a ready assent.

The Quaker might have been expected to repay courtesy with courtesy.

No such thing. He was going, as he felt assured, on a fool's errand, and anticipating a longer "put-off" at his journey's end, was cross and irritable all the way, abusing William heartily for winning the affections of his niece, affirming again and again and again that he would never give his assent to the match.

William discreetly kept silent.

To the old man's astonishment and delight he was paid at once. This put him in the best of humours—changed his mood completely.

Of this his companion took advantage, spoke of his deep attachment to Sally, and begged that he would be more favourable to their courtship than he had been.

Instead of turning sharply on the earnest pleader he said,

"See, friend Hutton, I esteem thee, but I love my niece, and the truth is I fear to countenance a rover like thee. The man for Sally Cox must be faithful unto death, or he would break her tender heart."

"Ah, Mr. Grace, there will be no more roving. Love is a shy bird and apt to take wing if roughly lured. My fancy hath been often caught, but common sense hath said

'beware,' and I have left the over-ripe fruit for others to gather. I respect Sally as much as I love her, I shall never rove from her. I thought my sister Catherine perfect until I saw her. Our hearts have united, do not refuse your sanction."

"Well, well, I suppose thee must have thy way, since Sally seemeth set on the match as much as thee. But Farmer Cox and his wife will have to be consulted."

"Ah, Mr. Grace, if only *you* put in a good word for us, *they* will not say 'nay,'" replied William, with so much absolute confidence in his manner, that the subtle flattery sank into the Quaker's soul, and added to his good humour.

Indeed so completely had the unexpected jingling of the guineas in his pocket kept up his good-will that he suffered William to enter the back-parlour of the "Golden Stocking" in advance, whilst he questioned his apprentice behind the counter anent the trade done in his absence, and evinced neither surprise nor displeasure on discovering his late companion with an arm round his little niece and her face rosy-red from her lover's first kiss.

It was William's impromptu and no doubt satisfactory intimation that he had overcome the opposition of her good uncle, and that henceforth their courtship might be openly

acknowledged. For though his love-fever had burnt itself out over Dolly Parker, and passion was dead, a more enduring if less fiery affection had taken possession of him, and though he no longer lay awake with throbbing brow and brain tormented with doubts and jealous fears, he was genuinely overjoyed to clasp the coy maiden and call her "his own dear love."

All had happened as he could have wished. He had rid himself of Bromsgrove and its associations; Dolly Field had disappeared too in the very nick of time, he did not bestir himself to inquire whither. His courtship had begun most auspiciously. He had wiped the slate of memory clean and written thereon a new name. He wanted no old sweethearts there to trouble his "dear love" with even the shadow of a doubt; as for Susannah Finch she was too far away to trouble any one, and doubtless she had consoled herself as readily as had Miss Tilt.

But though, thus self-satisfied, he walked beside Miss Cox to meeting on the Sabbath, as who should say "I have achieved a victory," he had as yet another ordeal to face, as Francis Grace did not fail to remind him.

"Friend Hutton, thee should moderate thy confidence. It is not well to make so sure of Sally till thou hast been to Aston. Brother

and sister Cox will not send out their daughter portionless, but they may not be led to intrust either the maid or their money unto thee. Nevertheless, if thou canst make it convenient to quit thy business for a day or two, I will bear thee company thither, and throw my word into the balance."

"A marvellous change this," thought William as he answered with promptitude, "Name any day convenient to yourself, sir, I will make it suit me."

March, which had followed up the storms of February with the proverbial leonine roar, was quieting down to the bleat of the symbolic lamb when on the twenty-first the two neighbours mounted their steady beasts and left the Bull Ring and business behind on their matrimonial errand, followed by the "God-speed" of a fair damsel who stood tiptoe on the top step, with a palpitating heart, to watch them up the High Town.

She had herself penned a dutiful letter to her parents of which William was the bearer, and when they were lost to sight, went back to her domestic concerns full of doubts whether she had not better have said this or that, or whether anything she had said would sway the decision of her father and mother in their favour. It was a more anxious time for her, waiting in the solitude created by their

absence, than for William. He was her first love, and though the feeling had stolen upon her gradually and imperceptibly, it was not the less absorbing.

The composure of her manner left her throbbing pulses unsuspected even by the one whose presence had set them beating; and even he hardly knew how singly and how solely he was loved.

Yet she did not dream away the hours, or sit down to a spinnet to warble sentimental love ditties. She went about her household ways; she endeavoured to supply her uncle's absence in the shop; she stepped into their neighbour's premises to assure herself that all was going well, or to give a quiet hint where it was not, as she had promised the master, and at night sat down to her wheel, and called in Vill to read his lessons out to her. Subdued by Quaker discipline she kept her emotions under cover, and none suspected how much the journey taken by uncle and lover meant to her.

There were a thousand distractions for William by the way. The business he had left occupied his mind as well as did the business before him. The conversation of his companion was widely irrelevant. Not a town or village they passed through (they were bound to Aston-upon-Trent, not to Aston by Bir-

mingham) but brought up some reminiscence of the times he had plodded through on foot either wholly destitute, or indifferently supplied; and the contrast was too flattering to his importance to suggest the doubts and fears that beset the farmer's undemonstrative daughter.

Yet he felt a few qualms when they halted at the farm, and dismounting, unlatched a wide wooden gate which swung back heavily and clashed behind them as they led their weary steeds through the farm-yard where a great turkey-cock strutted with expanded tail at the head of his tribe, the ducks waddled off quacking to their pool for safety, and one or two matronly hens cluck-clucked to call their silly chicks around them at the approach of strangers.

A shock-headed lad in a coarse smock-frock put down a pitchfork and took charge of their horses. Francis Grace led the way to the front of the house which overlooked a quaint and trimly bordered garden with an approach from the village; an approach the more necessary since John Cox, like his father before him, combined shop-keeping with farming, though there were no outward indications of the trade, carried on as it was in a room on the left of the porch, having an open door immediately beyond the threshold.

In this porch, overgrown with ivy, they were met and welcomed cordially by a russet-cheeked dame in a plain full-skirted gown of brown linsey, protected from smear or soil by a homespun apron long and wide, the flax for which had been grown and dressed and spun upon the farm, and which was almost as snowy as the closely-fitting unfrilled cap upon her head or the lawn kerchief covering neatly neck and bust.

"Thou art welcome, brother Francis, and thy friend likewise," and she extended her brown hand with quiet dignity to each in turn. "Walk into the house and pray be seated. Jenny"—to a tidy woman spreading a tablecloth—"tell thy master friends await him, and remove these riding-coats and whips." They had been thrown loosely down upon the bright settle.

"John will be here anon," she resumed, after another message to the domestic, having relation to the internal solace of the travellers. "Meanwhile, tell me, doth the town agree with Sally? And doth the dear maid seem content with thee?"

"Um," answered Francis Grace giving a comical twist to his head, "the town doth agree with Sally well enough, but of late she hath not been so well content to stay with me."

"How so?" questioned John Cox, a short

drab-coated individual who had come upon the scene and was shaking hands with both.

"Friend Hutton is the bearer of a letter from Sally. Doubtless that will explain. As the young man hath been the chief cause of her discontent, I thought well to bring him hither and settle what had best be done with the twain."

William had already the letter in his hand. Two pairs of eyes shot anxious glances towards him as he gave it up to the farmer, who broke the seal and read it through without a word of comment.

"Well," began Francis Grace, when the farmer passed the letter to his wife, "how are we to settle the matter? Are we to unite the pair and their fortunes, or are we to punish them by separation and banish Sally to Aston or Derby?"

"Be not over hasty, Francis. Thou art ever too impetuous. Thou hast given the young man no chance to say a word for himself. And the matter is too weighty for hasty decision. We will think it over whilst we partake our afternoon meal."

The house-place was spacious, though the ceiling was somewhat low, and crossed with great rough beams, whence hams and bacon hung suspended; the fire-place was wide and open, with seats in the nooks on either side

the hearth, where a fire of logs was burning brightly, hissing, spluttering, and flaming by fits. A large oak dresser occupied the opposite wall, set out with pewter plates, and dishes, and tankards in which the fitful flames had bright reflections, as they had in the long settle, and patriarchal arm-chair, and the tall clock that stood up grimly in the corner—a representative of time, with works to outlast generations of men.

Indeed, all the furniture was of oak, from the regiment of wooden-bottomed, straight-backed chairs, ranged stiffly against the wainscot, to the ponderous long table set beneath the broad casement window, where the would-be-white little panes shone in the light of the afternoon sun, and sent shafts of pale green or yellow athwart the home-bleached table cloth, the steel and pewter, the mugs and drinking horns, the pies, the ham, the cheese, the loaves and wheaten-cakes, and on the oval tea-board set out with dainty china cups and saucers never meant for common hand or use.

Sons and daughters came in and after saluting the visitors took their places, men-servants and maid-servants did the same, Farmer Cox remained standing until the silent and reverent grace was said by each within himself, and then the viands were attacked

with all the heartiness of country appetites. The farmer and his sons addressed themselves to the ale, and so did Francis Grace, but William won the heart of the good dame by declaring in favour of tea, and by the havoc he made in one of her incomparable raised pies.

Notwithstanding the clatter of knives and forks it was a decorous meal for the time, and if knives went into the salt-cellars for lack of spoons, so did they in higher places.

William, sitting with his back to the window, had eyes for everything, from the gaudily painted pictures of the Apostles upon the walls, to the comestibles decorating the ceiling. Tokens of prosperous abundance were around him, and who shall say they did not add a value to the fair daughter of the house.

Every meal has an end. The younger branches dispersed, bearing with them their town-bred visitors to see the farm, whilst Francis Grace had a private chat with the elders.

The table was cleared when he returned; long clay pipes and a tankard had been introduced, and—William having declined both—the momentous conference was opened by the question of John Cox:

"What dost thee require, friend Hutton?"

CHAPTER VIII.

WEIGHED IN THE BALANCE.

"WHAT dost thee require?" A simple question and easily put, but one seldom answered without trepidation by the most assured of lovers when the result is at all doubtful.

William had long known that John Cox was a Derbyshire yeoman, farming his own estate, but since he had seen the farm and the substantiality it indicated his own views had enlarged.

"Ah, sir, I desire above all earthly blessings the possession of your daughter's hand. I esteem and admire her beyond all her sex; and we are greatly attached to each other."

"Very good," quoth the farmer, "so far as it goeth. But attachment and admiration will not live with an empty larder. I take the testimony of brother Francis, here, for thy character and so forth, but I must know something of thy circumstances before I pass my word one way or other. Sally is twenty-four, and of age to please herself, but she is

too discreet to marry where her parents disapprove."

"Well, sir, I entered Birmingham a few years ago with a very small stock of books and no capital, and now by my own unceasing industry, energy, attention and frugality I have accumulated a reserve of two hundred pounds. My shop is well stocked, and my house fairly furnished for a bachelor. Then whatever portion you choose to give with Miss Cox would go to swell the sum, and secure us against adverse fortune."

"Thee dost not beat about the bush, young man. But I do not set that against thee. I like plain dealing. To be as plain, when Sally marries I will give her one hundred pounds, if that will suit thee."

William's countenance fell. He had built on thrice the dower since he had come to Aston! "That is very little," he faltered forth. "I trusted you would have found her double that sum." He did not *say* treble, if he thought it.

"I have other daughters to portion off, and sons. More I cannot give," said the farmer gravely, adding, as he observed the prudent suitor's hesitation: "We do not desire thee to marry Sally at all unless thou art thoroughly satisfied."

Then Mrs. Cox put in a word in the mildest

of tones: "Thee cannot expect more from us than we can give."

"Certainly not;" but it was said very half-heartedly, and the old people looked somewhat disappointed.

"What settlement wouldst thou make?" then asked the mother, whose own dowry had been settled upon herself.

"I do not see that a settlement would be needed for so small a sum. Lawyers are expensive assistants. As I have two hundred already laid by, Sally would in any case be sure of her own, as her thirds"

"Thou mayst be right," said the father.

"Aye, right as a stocking," cried the uncle. "William's a good business man and a thriving."

And with that the subject dropped for the night, the entrance of sons and daughters barring further discussion, but the sturdy yeoman and his wife did not dispute the statement that William Hutton was a "good business man," a "little too business-like" they thought, for a man in love.

After breakfast in the morning, when their horses were saddled and at the door, although it was Sunday, Mrs. Cox asked him gently, "What thinkest thou of the match this morning?"

"I will consider of it!" he replied, hoping

his irresolution would induce an advanced offer.

Nothing was farther from the farmer's intention. As the travellers mounted their horses at the gate, he said to William very soberly: "If thy desire be for the maid, her fortune will be a second consideration. If thou makest the guineas thy first concern, we would rather our daughter did not wed thee. Wedlock is for life, so weigh the matter well, young man. Francis Grace knoweth our feelings, and will act as he seeth fit. If one hundred pounds sufficeth not, there must be no further courtship, and the maid will return home."

"I do not value Miss Cox for her portion," began Mr. Hutton apologetically, for the farmer had touched a sore spot, "but——"

"That will do. We understand," interrupted John Cox, and waved his hand, as if a sort of signal for their departure. If the old farmer had not been a Quaker prior to his marriage with Sarah Grace, he had thoroughly identified himself with that people in course of years, and his "yea" was "yea."

Being so near to Derby it was natural that both the hosier and the bookseller should extend their journey to visit relatives and friends.

Three years before William Hutton the

woolcomber had married a third wife, one who ruled him with a strong hand. He had become partially paralyzed, and the son was grieved to see the change time, drink, and disease had wrought in him. He left behind him a substantial proof of his prosperity and of his filial affection, but he said nothing of his courtship. Markeaton was within reach of gossip, and he was desirous to take counsel with his sister Catherine before any decisive step.

At sunrise the following morning, Monday, he was off to Nottingham. Francis Grace, who had nothing of the Centaur about him, preferred a day's repose, and much to his companion's satisfaction remained in Derby.

William Hutton did not care to bring his Quaker friend into close proximity with townspeople who had known him as a lad or a poor frame-knitter, and he did need the solitary ride for meditation. He told himself that he was in love with Sally Cox—over head and ears—and that there never was woman born so admirably suited for his wife, nevertheless he put her and her hundred pounds into the balance against himself and his two hundred, and not all the love he had to throw into her scale as a make-weight sufficed to equalize the beam. He had not settled with himself whether he should accept

the offer of John Cox. He thought the rich farmer had a right to endow his daughter in a more liberal manner, and was disposed to reject the mere hundred pounds, only that would be tantamount to a repudiation of his "dear love," and so far he was not prepared to go.

It was in such dilemma he rode between the Sand Hills into Nottingham through the open space where the Bar Gate had formerly stood, his matrimonial cogitations being lost in the wave of pride that swelled his breast as one or other of the townsfolk raised their hats to salute "Mr Hutton" as he passed them on his way to Bearward Lane. He had left the town on foot. He made his triumphal entry on the back of his own steed!

It was a proud day also for Mrs. Perkins when the brother she had equipped for his new venture came riding up to her humble door, and fastening the reins to a staple in the wall, left Smiler standing there for all the folk to see.

It was a testimony to her own discernment, a proof that she had a brother worthy of herself, one strong enough to throw off the old tradition of Hutton sluggishness and supine inactivity.

If there had been any ill-feeling when they parted in Birmingham it was forgotten now

in the hearty embrace he gave her on the threshold.

He had caught Thomas at the end of his breakfast time. "Why Bill, it's never thee!" he ejaculated, opening wide his eyes. "Whose horse have you borrowed?"

"It's my own."

"Your own! Who'd have thought it! But I must go. You will be here at noon?"

"Aye, sure." And he walked off breaking into a whistle as he went to his journeywork, the only token of satisfaction he was known to indulge in. Envy he did not know. He kept his own even course, was his sister's gardener and companion when work was done, and he was well content.

"The merciful man is merciful to his beast," observed Mrs. Perkins, when the first salutations were over. "Put your horse up at the 'Angel.' Breakfast shall be ready for you when you come back."

She directed and he obeyed, as in the old days, and though more than one individual claimed acquaintance with him who would have formerly passed him by, he neither kept his sister or his breakfast waiting. It was simply milk porridge such as he had known of old, but it was neither smoked nor burned, as would have been likely had Patience been the cook.

Whilst he was eating Catherine unfolded her budget of home news at his request, spinning industriously all the while.

"You know Samuel could not stand the quarrelling and fighting between Aunt Ann and Robert Tanner, and ran away after eighteen months' whip-making. Robert advertised him as a runaway, and threatened to wear out one of his own whips upon him if he came back."

"I hope he did not get the chance."

"He did not. We did not hear of Sam until he was of age, and could not be brought back by him. He had enlisted in a grenadier regiment, and was a corporal when he wrote to me two months ago."

"The life will suit Sam. He is fond of roving."

"So is some one else I know," put in Catherine dryly. After a brief pause she went on, "Do you ever hear from the Wards!"

"No. Do you?"

"Uncle was here only last week. He came, thinking he could buy his hosiery here first hand cheaper than in Leicester. He was buying for both shops. He said Aunt Ward's old servant was dead, and they had got some one living with them now, a lacemaker named Field, who was much more profitable to them.

Aunt Ward had ever an eye to the main chance."

"Soh! Dolly's there, is she!" was William's inner thought. His expressed one concerned his aunts.

"Aye, they could only look at anything over the rims of their guineas."

"That is a common complaint, brother Will. I trust it will never be your case."

He made no reply, but he visibly winced. How should he open the subject he came about? Mrs. Perkins saved him the effort, as usual taking the initiative.

"When a man buys a horse, we suppose he is thriving. Is it not time you thought of marrying?"

"I am thinking of marrying. I came to consult you about it."

"Well, Susannah Finch is still single. She hath had more than one offer but hath said 'no' to all;" was said with covert meaning, "and she will not make a bad wife."

"Then I hope she may find a good husband somewhere. But *she* is not the one I think of marrying."

"Indeed! And where do you suppose you will find a better?" she asked sharply, displeased that her choice should be set aside.

"I think I have found one, Catherine. The first woman I could at all compare with you.

She is a daughter of Farmer Cox, of Aston, the niece of my neighbour Mr. Grace, and is his housekeeper."

She looked incredulous. "They are said to be rich. Will *they* give their daughter to *you?*"

"Yes! but," and he hesitated, "the fortune they offer is small, only a hundred pounds."

"Well, when you started business you had not a hundred pence to call your own. Fortune! Pah! that's a trifle! What's the woman?"

"Exactly to my wish. Might have been made for me. She is neat, frugal, industrious, retiring."

"Then she hath a fortune within her. I am surprised you should weigh money against her. A virtuous woman is above rubies."

"Ah, Catherine, you mistake; Miss Cox is a treasure, and lies close in my heart. But I am not a sponge, I should never go to them again. What they have to give I should prefer at once."

"No doubt! So every man would argue for himself. Farmer Cox would fain see whether you merit a second hundred."

"Ah, that did not occur to me. Then you would advise me to take what they offer."

"If you wish to take the girl—yes. I hoped you had come for Susannah Finch.

But a man's love is not to be counted on. And she hath no portion to buy it with. I am sorry for her, poor lass. Her father gets queerer and poorer every year. However, your marriage may be her cure. When hope dies love will follow."

"Ah, Catherine, I fancy you blame me over Susannah Finch; but on my honour I never said a word of love to her, or was more attentive than to others. Her father and yourself may be more in fault."

"Well, well," struck in Mrs. Perkins, impatiently, "let us change the subject. Tell me of yourself, your business, and your friends."

He was ready enough to do this, and as a proof of his success brought out a small bag of gold and laid upon the table a little pile.

"There, Catherine, is the balance of the money you lent me, with a trifle for interest. My debt of gratitude can never be discharged."

"I think there is another debt of gratitude you have not attempted to discharge. Among your new friends you have not named the two workmen who found you on the Market Cross, and were friends to you in your need. Have you sought them out?" and she looked him over searchingly, as she rose from her wheel to prepare a dinner.

William's eyes fell. He blundered out as a sort of excuse, "You advised me to pick up no friends I might wish to drop."

"I did not advise ingratitude. There are ways of returning kindness to such men without intimate association. And what is Thomas but a working man? what were you? Worth is not to be estimated by a coat or a calling. And fine friends are not always true friends."

He had been so long his own master his sister's lecturing was not over acceptable. He took it silently, but rose when she did, saying, "I will have a stroll round the town until dinner time." But as he went he muttered, "Catherine forgets I am out of leading strings. Her judgment is correct, but rebuke is not palatable."

Scarcely had he emerged from Bearward Lane with his face set towards the Market Place, than he encountered Mr. Finch, looking older, grimier, shabbier, with snuff on the falling ends of his dingy neckcloth, on his unbrushed waistcoat and breeches. One withered and unwashed hand was put forth to be shaken, the other simultaneously opening and offering his inevitable snuff-box. He was excited and obsequious.

"Your servant, Mr. Hutton. Proud to see you, sir. Pleased you do not forget old friends. You was on your way, was you not,

to Bridlesmith Gate? I told Susannah you was sure to call. She hath been looking out for you all the morning."

"Indeed. How did you know I was in Nottingham?"

"Know? Is not your return and prosperity the common talk? You will come and shake hands with Susannah? I once thought ——. But no matter. I have some rare works I can let you have—a bargain, sir."

It had been William Hutton's intention to avoid Bridlesmith Gate, and the bookseller's, but he could not well rid himself of the old man, and he allowed himself to be led against his will, Mr. Finch keeping up a running stream of chatter as they went.

"No doubt, sir, you have the old press at work still. Ah, yes, I thought as much. *That* was a bargain! I feel, sir, as if in selling you that I had been the humble instrument of your prosperity. And I am proud of it. I am indeed, sir. Here we are! Susannah, Mr. Hutton hath come to see you."

Mr. Hutton was strongly inclined to contradict this latter statement, but he had not the heart to give pain when he saw what a flutter the girl was in at his approach, and the signs of some foregone trouble.

It was clear to the most casual observer that Susannah Finch had been weeping, and

very recently. The mottled redness of her face, the swollen pulpiness about the eyes betrayed her. She put forth her hand with an air of affected gaiety, but her smile could not disguise the trace of tears; and William, with his sister's rebuke fresh in his ears, could not fail to regard himself, however remotely, as the cause.

Her father had brought the news that William Hutton had come riding into the town on a horse of his own, and after a few sharp taunts on the ill use she had made of her visit to Birmingham four years before, had ordered her to trim herself up and look her best when he came their way. To facilitate this he had hastened to greet the new arrival, leaving as a parting shot his strict injunctions for her "to secure the young man this time."

She would gladly have done so years before had it been possible, but she had long concluded it was hopeless, although inconsistently clinging to an intangible film of hope, in spite of reason and common sense.

Her father brimmed over with artifice, imbibed it with his snuff, and filled the atmosphere around him alike with both. She was utterly devoid of art, and his harsh command that she "must beguile the man into matrimony," had alike shocked and unnerved her.

She must have loved him well to have been constant to an ideal for four silent years, wherein hope was nourished alone by scraps of consolation or news from Mrs. Perkins, who laid stress on his prolonged bachelorhood, and who certainly was not without blame in representing as possible that which she had set her mind on. But the very strength and purity of the affection which had sprung up unsought and survived rebuffs and silence, made the suggestion of intrigue and finesse repulsive. She had learned too late how she had been thrown in Mr. Hutton's way, how in running to and fro voluntarily or not, her motives had been misinterpreted; and, truth to tell, she felt ashamed more than glad to come face to face again with one whose heart had been turned from her by seeming attempts to inveigle him.

She was awkward and constrained, and he was not much better.

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE SPUR OF THE MOMENT.

William Hutton was soon at his ease. After a commonplace inquiry after Miss Finch's health, a remark on the weather, on the changes in the town, and a word or two of thanks for her attention to his sister, which she answered as best she could, he turned to the old bird, watching them slyly through one eye with head cocked aside, and asked to see what he had to show him.

It was a mass of what might have been a litter of waste paper, so fragmentary, old, and dusty was the lot; as such it had been sold to Mr. Finch.

"These papers," said he, with a flourish, "were all the property of our late worthy historian, Dr. Deering, sir." (William pricked up his ears, but held his tongue.) "I managed to secure them from his administrators at a heavy cost. All was in disorder until I sorted and arranged the manuscripts and scraps. It has been a work of time, but I never spare myself, sir, and you will credit

me when I say that I preserved them for you, for *you*, Mr. Hutton. I felt they would have interest for you as a native of Derby, and—a—I was sure you would be coming some day, either to see Mrs. Perkins—fine woman your sister, sir—or to carry off a wife to your new home."

"A man need not go far from his own door to find a wife if he desires one," answered William, annoyed by the old fellow's sly manner, "and I have heaps of rubbish like this offered me every week. I was not likely to ride so far either for a wife or for waste paper."

The old man's countenance had fallen; Susannah, too, looked downcast. William, turning over the odds and ends, notes, memoranda, and printed matter, turned over another idea in his mind to bear fruit in a future day, "Why should not I, too, become 'a worthy historian?' I have facilities for collecting material such as this."

Mistaking his silence, and afraid of letting a customer slip, as well as a son-in-law, Mr. Finch hastened to say, "Oh, ah, I forgot you were in the trade, sir; but you would really find some interesting scraps there, and you shall have them for a mere trifle for old friendship's sake."

"Ah, well," assented William Hutton, hesitatingly, "I fancy my horse would not think

the old papers worth carrying away, but if your demand is reasonable I don't mind taking them. I knew Dr. Deering, and I know Derby, and so may amuse myself in looking them over."

Susannah slipped away almost heart-broken when the pair began to bargain unmindful of her, and did not reappear. When the bargain was struck the embyro historian had secured a heap of crude but valuable material, and Mr. Finch had obtained shillings for what had cost him pence, and had been unsaleable. If he had not disposed of his daughter he had at least made a profitable sale, and that was next best.

Indeed it made him bold to suggest that Susannah would make an excellent wife, and that he thought she and William were made for each other.

It was a sad disappointment to Mr. Finch to hear from Mr. Hutton's own lips that his choice had fallen elsewhere, and that he had left his business solely to arrange about the marriage portion of the young lady.

This was the death-blow to Susannah's hopes and to her father's schemes.

William rode out of Nottingham after tea, with Dr. Deering's odd notes and memoranda in his saddle-bags, little wotting how sore a heart or how true a one he had left behind.

And he must have come to a decision anent Farmer Cox's proposal, since he walked to Markeaton after he put up Smiler in Derby, and was introduced by Francis Grace to his kindred as the future bridegroom of Sally Cox.

Nevertheless marriage did not follow immediately. He had not quite reconciled his mind to the acceptance of only one hundred pounds, although every day made the self-contained maiden more dear to him, and every day taught him how much a wife was needed at the head of his small household.

Patience tried *his* patience exceedingly. She was not exactly inert, but she was forgetful. Her mind seemed always wandering in a mist or labyrinth of speculation, and with the best intentions in the world, she made the most provoking blunders, left undone the most commonplace and palpable duties. She justified her name in the meekness and submission with which she took rebuke, but that did not make her negligence less irritating.

When on the Tuesday afternoon our two travellers left their horses at the "Garland," and Mr. Hutton, carrying his own saddle-bags, crossed the road, he beheld, standing at his own door, the well-known top-heavy carriage of John Baskerville, the japanner, distin-

guished as it was by gilding and a choice picture painted on every panel.

He hurried in, to find the little gentleman in his gold-buttoned collarless blue coat and gold-buckled black satin breeches leaning over the counter, at once dictating a brief message for Vill to transcribe on a slate, and giving the boy a valuable lesson in caligraphy at the same time.

Vill, whose education was carried on in a very desultory manner, had squared his elbows, set his head on one side, and with his fingers gathered together in a heap over his pencil, begun to set down the message in large unshapely characters which offended the eye of the once-upon-a-time stone-cutter and writing master.

"Stay, my boy," interrupted he, "that is not the way to hold your pencil. Extend your fingers, take your pencil between the tip of your thumb and the side of your middle finger, and steady it with your forefinger, so" (giving a practical illustration). "Now let the little finger rest lightly upon the slate, and you will be able to use your pencil freely. Yes, that is better. Ah, that is not the way to make a capital N. The downstroke should spread out thus, so that upside or down the letter is the same; and observe, the small *o* should be almost the shape of an egg."

"Thank you, sir, I understand," said Vill, making a fresh start.

"Your servant, sir," began Mr. Hutton, as he came in unawares and took in the scene at a glance. "I hope I see you well. You have done my 'prentice honour. I hope he will profit by your gracious instructions."

"Pooh! pooh! that is a small matter. It is a pity so well-mannered and intelligent a lad should not be able to write a fair hand. I like to encourage talent or diligence. He was taking down a message for you, just to say there is no immediate hurry about those samples if they are not ready."

"Not ready!" ejaculated the bookseller in surprise. "Have you not had them? I left the parcel ready to be sent on Saturday. I have been out of town, sir, or you would not have been disappointed. Where is the parcel?" to Vill.

"If you please, master," began Vill, "we could not find it. Patience thought you must——"

It was the old story. Patience had taken up the small parcel in a fit of abstraction, carried it out of the shop, and after much seeking it was found under her master's linen apron, which had not been folded up or put away.

Vill was at once dispatched after the car-

riage with the parcel to Baskerville House, a fine, square, red brick mansion with stone dressings, having workshops out of sight in the rear, standing within its own cultivated grounds on a slight eminence dubbed by the owner "Easy Hill," and at that time outside the growing town. A ring fence enclosed the whole, giving both importance and exclusiveness.

A double flight of steps protected by an ornamental hand-rail led to the front entrance. On the broad topmost flag Vill waited with his parcel until the door was opened. As he stood there looking down on the quaint garden below, where box and yew were clipped to shape, he said to himself, "I wonder if I ever dreamt of a garden like this; whenever I come here, I feel as if I had. A big garden with a large house in it. But the steps in my dream were different. They seemed low and flat and not in the middle of the house."

The door opened. His speculations were put to flight. The parcel was taken in and he waited for an answer. Then he was asked to step inside.

It was the first time, and he gazed around him in wonder at the magnificence of the spacious hall and staircase, wonder not unmixed with the same vague feeling of familiarity with a like grand interior in the hazy mist of dream-

land. The staircase was a marvel of architectural art. The iron balustrades had been exquisitely wrought from Mr. Baskerville's own choice designs. There were lamps swinging up aloft from gilded chains, or resting on carved brackets; and niches holding statues on which Vill gazed with awe.

In the library to which he was shown he beheld like evidence of opulence and art in the carved mantle-pieces, the novel firegrates, the carved bookcases and furniture, the lacquered and japanned cabinets, the painted panels. The master of it all was scarcely seen in the boy's marvelling admiration of his surroundings. Yet there he stood by a table with some papers in his hand, and for a moment watched Vill's deep-set eyes roving everywhere to settle at last on some elaborately-carved woodwork.

"Do you admire that?" asked Mr. Baskerville.

"It is *beautiful!*" said the boy rapturously. It was like a revelation to him.

"Here," said the well-pleased gentleman, "are some writing copies. Take them with you for imitation. Let me see you have improved when I am in town again."

He was thanked, and the boy departed, full of the wonders he had seen, but unable to give expression to all he thought.

"I wish I had a knife," said he, "I would try to carve things like those."

"You would only cut your fingers," objected Patience. "Better copy that beautiful writing, it will be more use to you."

The writing was done over and over with varying success, and his assiduity was commended. But the desire to imitate the carved devices he had seen never left him. He saved his few pence, bought a knife, and made the attempt on sticks from the firewood faggots.

Of course he made a litter of chips on the kitchen hearth, but Patience swept them up with never a grumble.

Her master was beginning to grumble at her. He now drank coffee, and she spoiled the coffee in the roasting. Meals were never punctual She, however, capped all one day when dinner time came, and it was apparent that although the vegetables were boiling in the pot, the beef that should have been boiled with them had been left uncooked in the larder. She had been "thinking of something else."

Her master had already disposed of his horse, having no further use for him. He thought it quite time to get rid of his housekeeper also before she made some greater blunder. When fasting had been imperative he had borne it bravely, but he told bewildered and penitent Patience,

"To be cheated of dinner when there is beef

for the boiling would try a philosopher. Hunger despises philosophy."

He again fell back on his old arrangement for meals at his neighbour's, but some way or other it did not altogether answer, though it did bring him into closer and more frequent companionship with his sweetheart.

However active and willing Vill might be, and however forgetful Patience might have been, there were numberless little matters calling for feminine attention, or left undone for want of a feminine hand. Vill had already shown some dexterity in the use of his pocket-knife on wood, held his pen or pencil with better result, could handle a needle to stitch folded sheets of paper for binding, but to darn a stocking or repair a rent respectably was beyond the skill of either apprentice or master, and for household drudgery the former had a sort of instinctive abhorrence. He almost rose into open rebellion against the use of a mop and pail or a scrubbing-brush, and made such a mess of his garments with his enforced housewifery, that William soon saw the false economy of setting him to the uncongenial work.

He had always been willing to fetch and carry for Patience, to relieve her from any burden his own strength would support, to bear the brunt of her shortcomings, but his

repugnance to help her in anything destructive of personal neatness and cleanliness was not to be overcome. This fastidious regard for his appearance which had grown upon him of late made him a more desirable assistant behind the counter but a very bad substitute for a servant in the house. Then, the dining out, if it saved the cost and trouble of a fire, had its disadvantages. As business steadily increased, the presence of a competent attendant became the more urgent. The bookseller had to hurry over his meals, or to leave them unfinished, being liable to a sudden call from Vill, who had to quit his post to summon him. He was not quite sure he had done wisely in dismissing Patience.

One sultry day in June a testy old gentleman, indignant at finding only a little 'prentice lad behind the counter, and too impatient to wait until Mr. Hutton could be called, marched off straightway to the shop of Mr. Aris.

He was a well-known customer, who spent his money freely, and his defection meant both loss and annoyance to the thrifty shopkeeper.

It dwelt in his mind, and when, in the course of the afternoon Dr. Dowler walked in for a chat over the counter, he could not forbear telling his vexation.

The doctor listened, tapped his silver snuff-

box, took a long pinch, and when Mr. Hutton paused nodded his head and remarked,

"In my opinion, Mr. Hutton, you want a wife. Some one to make your house a home, and to be on the spot with authority in your absence. A housekeeper is a sorry substitute, she hath her own interests to serve. A wife's interest is identical with your own. You should marry. That is my opinion, and you can have it without a fee."

In came Mr. Ryland, took off his three-cornered hat to the doctor, shook hands with his friend, and whilst he dipped his finger and thumb in the proffered snuff-box asked "What's the latest news?"

"Dr. Dowler hath been prescribing a wife to keep impatient customers in good humour during my absence," quoth William Hutton with a smile.

"Very sensible of Dr. Dowler," was Mr. Ryland's observation. "I met your 'prentice Vill just now with a hole in his stocking the size of a penny, a vest minus half its complement of buttons, and I thought, doctor, if our friend's apparel was in like condition he would not much longer remain a bachelor. There's a delicate little lady next door only waiting for a wedding ring to play the good fairy in this abode, and fill the dark places with sunshine. I recommend your prescription strongly."

That night William Hutton took his guineas out of his desk again, thoughtfully, and counted them over once more. Considerable additions had been made to the two hundred. He went to bed to toss about and think. He was realizing the loss he sustained from neglect, the waste of his own time and Vill's in unprofitable occupations, and the absolute loss of a good customer for lack of a sufficient deputy; to say nothing of personal discomfort. The doctor and William Ryland had given a fillip to his slumbering intent.

Why, the very papers he had brought from Nottingham remained untouched in his saddle-bags for lack of opportunity to inspect them. The evenings he spent at the "Golden Stocking" would be spent on his own hearth if his dear love sat there.

He went to sleep with Dr. Dowler's "opinion" floating through his mind.

He wakened suddenly in the morning between six and seven to be greeted with the twittering of a pair of sparrows that had built a nest under the eaves.

"The birds mate and trust in providence for support," ruminated he, "why should I remain single? What am I waiting for? We love each other. My trade increases. There is no dread of poverty. There is no reason for delay, nothing to expect or gain by it.

What must be done soon may as well be done now. To name a future day is only to fix a shackle. I will rise and tell my dear love she must be no longer single"

He was on the floor and dressing with all speed, blaming himself for his long and unnecessary delay.

It wanted yet a quarter to seven when he took Miss Cox by surprise with the sudden announcement,

"Sally, my dear, we have been too long apart. I desire to be married to-day."

"To-day, William! Oh, that is too sudden; I am not prepared. I have no wedding garments. What would my uncle say?"

"I am going to marry you, not your gown. Whatever dress you wear is delightful unto me," and he emphasized the compliment with a clasp and a kiss, which brought a blush to Sarah's cheek.

As the clock struck seven down came the old gentleman for his breakfast. He opened his eyes on finding William there so early.

"Mr. Grace, this is to be our wedding-day."

"William Hutton, thou art dreaming! Hast thou bidden the guests? Hast bought the licence or the ring? Hast thou set thy house in order?"

"I have bidden Sally and yourself. I am off now to get the licence and the ring, and

to bid William Ryland and Dr. Dowler. My house will never be set in order until Sally doth it. I've been single too long, my dear sir."

"It is so unexpected——" began Mr. Grace; but William Hutton's newly-born impetuosity carried the day.

The facilities for sudden marriages were great. William startled his friend Mr. Ryland at his breakfast. The two were speedily off together to procure a licence and arrange for the ceremony at St. Phillip's church. A ring was bought on their way to Dr. Dowler's, and before midday that sunny twenty-third of June, 1755, Francis Grace and William Ryland had signed their names as witnesses of the marriage of William Hutton and Sarah Cox—a marriage without any pomp of bridesmaids or bridal robes, carriages or wedding favours, and with only an impromptu feast at the "Golden Stocking," where Mrs. Ryland kept the bride in countenance, to celebrate the event.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE TWO HOMES.

Mr. Ryland had been quite right in saying that the delicate little lady would play the good fairy in William Hutton's abode. Without any honeymoon trip, without any dismay at the disorder confronting her on her bridegroom's hearth, without any waste of time for dalliance she took in hand the practical duties of wifehood, and brought sunshine literally into shady places.

As the wedding had been unpremeditated twelve hours in advance so no preparation had been made for her reception. And as there had been no woman-servant on the premises for more than a month, it may be supposed that the prospect before her was disheartening.

It may have been. At any rate she did not make a fuss about it. Her farmhouse training served her in good stead; she was not afraid or ashamed of any household work. She was light of hand and light of foot, was never in a bustle, never in a hurry, did not

make a racket or a commotion, yet she evolved order out of chaos, let sunshine in at the windows, and flooded dirt away down the gutters in less time than many a stronger woman might have done.

On first taking her home William had apologized for the general aspect, on the score that he was a bookseller not a housemaid, and having married precipitately at last had no chance of making special preparations. And he had offered to recall Patience as an assistant in putting the house in order, remarking, "I know the litter and untidiness will be an eyesore to you,as it hath been to me."

It was an eyesore to her, though little Vill had been doing his unskilled best all the evening to put things in condition for her coming.

But the composed little woman had a spirit of her own, and was resolved to prove herself equal to the redoubtable Mrs. Perkins, of whom she had heard so much.

"Thank thee, William, for thy consideration, but I can do all that is needful without assistance. I can then be sure it is done thoroughly and to my own mind. Would thy sister Catherine desire an assistant?"

"No, mappen not. But Catherine is taller and stronger," and he passed an arm around her slight form as if she needed support.

"So was Goliath taller and stronger than David," was her prompt rejoinder. Then in another tone she added, "Didst thou not take thy wife as a helpmate. I should scarcely be that if I added to thy expenses the cost of a handmaid as well as a wife. If I need a long arm or a strong one I will call upon thee, but if thee pleaseth we will have no strangers about the place."

How proudly he looked down upon her then. Such a wife would be a helpmate truly.

"As you please, dear love, so long as you remember I want your sweet company and your counsel as well as hand service."

"I will remember," she answered quietly, and the subject dropped.

The morning light revealed all that the obscurity of candlelight had left doubtful. She had a task before her. Not, perhaps, so great as might have been had William Hutton himself been careless and disorderly. He was neat and orderly in his habits, but he had never, even in his apprenticeship, been trained to woman's work, and now his business claimed all his time and his attention.

He could see and deplore the neglected state of his firegrates, floors, and furniture, but when he saw his little wife with her skirts tucked up waging war against spiders and

dust, on a ladder pulling down curtains for the wash, on her knees scrubbing the floors, it is questionable whether he more regretted marrying before his house was prepared for her reception or more admired her housewifely attainments.

That there was anything menial or unbecoming in such occupations for the bride of a prospering tradesman did not occur to either. If he was thriftily disposed, so was she. It was woman's work and therefore not more unseemly than to cook her husband's dinner. His mother had done such work, so had his aunt Ann, and his sister Catherine. He only looked on with the proud thought that Catherine could not have done better, always ready with a hand to lift or pull any article too heavy for Sarah's strength.

Strangely enough, Vill, who had resented manfully all attempts of Patience to enlist his services, was foremost to proffer them to his new mistress. "Let me do this," "Let me do that," "I can clean windows," "I can rub furniture;" there was nothing he could not or would not have done to help her, as if he had an intuitive perception she was too delicate for the work she had undertaken, and that it was his duty to relieve her.

There was an inherent spirit of chivalry in Vill, and her early notice of him had called it

into play. It needed not her commendation "Thee's a handy little lad," to make him her willing bond slave.

By the end of another week the house had quite another aspect. It felt differently. The atmosphere was no longer loaded with impalpable atoms of that destructive element called dust, and if there was a sensation of beeswax about, that was not unwholesome. Sarah had laid her husband's money-bag under contribution for household requisites. Patience had meekly dispensed with them rather than say "she could not work without tools," and he in his admiration and new happiness had opened it freely.

It may be the hundred pounds which shortly came to him in a large chest of linen and other matters from Aston's had been relied on, and though no second sitting-room was fitted up, the old chairs and table were dismissed to the kitchen and better ones with curiously twisted limbs took their places.

Chintz superseded the check curtains and sofa-cover, there was a larger square of quiet carpet laid upon the floor, the corner cupboard was supplied with china and glass, of which there had formerly been a dearth, and the high mantel-shelf received a few adornments in the way of japanned-ware and Derbyshire spar, for use as well as ornament.

The kitchen shone as brightly as the parlour, and the renovation had gone on upstairs as well as down.

"It is all very beautiful, Sally. Catherine could not have smartened up the place in better fashion. She would not know it again!" exclaimed William eulogistically when all was done, and the high encomium served to repay the active little wife who scorned to admit her fatigue, though it almost spoiled her own enjoyment of her handiwork.

Aye, almost destroyed her appreciation of the new attire prepared for her first appearance at the New Meeting House as a bride; though, in spite of quaker training, she was not above a womanly weakness for mercery and millinery, even if her taste was for subdued colours.

And, as no wedding garments had dignified the hasty ceremony, the omission had to be repaired afterwards, even Vill being treated to a new and better suit, as well as his master.

Tommy Green, who, when he worked at all, still worked for Mr. Perry, was again deputed to carry home the clothes. Down he flung the parcel before Mr. Hutton with an angry scowl, and in a tone which caused Vill to stand still with open-mouthed astonishment, cried out crossly,

"Si'thee, I dunnot see why I should be lackey to thee, when thah's getten a 'pren-

tice lad to fetch an' carry fur thee, mich moore t' th' lad."

"If Mr. Perry cannot find a more civil messenger I would prefer to send my 'prentice."

"Thy 'prentice indeed! some folk han theer bread buttered o' both soides! Gettin a 'prentice, an' takken a woife. Oi say, Mester, you'n th' devil's luck, an yo'r own too. I canno addle enow to keep my own sen i' bit and sup, mich moore keep a wife, and thah seems to be makin' thi' fortin."

"I told you before, Tommy Green, that industry, thrift, and sobriety are the best luck; that a man carries his fortune in his own hand, and so I tell you again," said William Hutton decisively, as he unfastened the wrap, not sorry to give a lesson to Vill also.

Si' thee!" snapped the tailor sharply, "Yo're ower fond o' preachin', but folk as carries theer heads so high may happen knock agen th' clouds an' be drownded i' th' shower. Dash me, but if ever I get a chance o' stickin' moi needle i' thee, oi'll mak thee skrike eawt. I suppose yo hanno th' price on a pint for a mon." This in a different tone.

"No. I don't throw my hard-earned pence down the gutter. Take your wrapper, and keep a civil tongue," retorted Mr. Hutton, annoyed by the man's uncalled-for spleen.

"My tongue's my own; I shanna clean it o'

thy door-mat!" growled the man, as he shambled down the steps muttering all the way he went; his envy rising to animosity.

Vill had looked and listened, all eyes and ears, alike wondering what was meant by a man having fortune in his hand, and still more at the little tailor's insolence towards his good master. Of that goodness Vill had never a doubt, for meeting as he did with other 'prentice lads out of doors, he heard tales of ill-usage and semi-starvation that took away his breath, and made the kindness and gentleness of his own master the greater from the contrast. Even the apprentices of Francis Grace derided the assertion that Mr. Hutton "never larruped" him, for they had felt the weight of the Quaker's admonitory stick. Then the kicks and blows of his hard father Field were unforgotten, and the boy regarded Mr. Hutton with the affection and veneration of a son. Dolly, Patience, and lastly Miss Cox, had one and all strengthened his belief that his master was an embodiment of all the virtues; so that his young indignation at the vituperative tailor rose in proportion to the pedestal on which his hero was set.

He would keep his eye on that man henceforth, be well assured. How he wished he was bigger, so that he might have knocked him down the steps headlong!

Of course William Hutton wrote to Catherine and Thomas in the first flush of his wedded bliss, enlarging on the many excellencies of his little helpmate, and he naturally expected a congratulatory reply from one or the other within a reasonable time, although ordinary people were not given to much correspondence.

About six or eight weeks went by. He began to feel annoyed; setting down silence to the account of dissatisfaction on the part of Catherine, and of want of interest on that of Thomas. Then came a letter from the latter, a brief unemotional epistle, conveying the good wishes of both, and saying that his sister was not well or she would have written herself, but giving an extremely inadequate idea of the battle the strong-minded woman was waging with disease and death.

Months trod their course before all the case came to William's knowledge.

Yet, whilst he had been courting and marrying, and rejoicing in his heart of hearts over the bride he had won—a counterpart of Catherine without Catherine's autocracy—Mrs. Perkins herself had been lying for weary months at the white gates of death, with Dr. Davison, one of Nottingham's chief physicians, watching her strange case uneasily, and with characteristic exercise of her own imperial

will she had forbidden any communication with her kin, father and brother included. "It is needless to disturb them, or bring them to disturb me," she argued.

After resisting with all the forces at her own disposal the advances of a chill caused by exposure to damp, Mrs. Perkins had at length succumbed and permitted Thomas to bring in a doctor. Many were the offers of feminine friends to wait upon her and keep her house in order, Mrs. Tanner among the rest, but she had her door resolutely closed against prying eyes and meddlesome fingers, not a feminine foot being allowed to cross her threshold—save one.

That one was Susannah Finch. Surely she was in high esteem.

Her Aunt Ann made capital of her exclusion, and of the obstinate folly which deputed to an inexperienced lass and to an ignorant booby of a brother the delicate duty of the sick-nurse, when she was ready to wait upon her niece night or day.

But Mrs. Perkins would have none of her. She had more faith in the heart and hand service of Susannah, and was sure, whilst lying on her painful couch upstairs, that all was well below. There would be no disorder, nothing displaced. It would have been a terrible aggravation of her illness to imagine

a strange hand turning over the linen and other treasures in her great coffer, or meddling with her wheel.

In Susannah she had perfect confidence, and the trust was well deserved and repaid.

Whether she loved Mrs. Perkins for the sake of her distant brother or for her own the effect was the same. She came and went, not altogether with the light and elastic step as of old, but, without neglecting her father's comfort, there she was to administer medicine, prepare food, make Catherine's bed, clear her room, or ease a pillow. And when weeks and months went by, bringing to the sufferer no relief, and only a looking forward to release through the portals of the grave, who could have watched or tended her with more untiring affection.

Slow-going Thomas too, who went to his journey-work during the day, developed an unsuspected faculty of wakefulness and ready attention during the night season when no Susannah could be there.

At length, when it was self-evident that his patient was sinking, the doctor admitted that his skill was baffled, and his remedies powerless.

Then, Mrs. Perkins gathered up her remaining strength, and with all her old incisiveness, in spite of an enfeebled frame and voice,

pointed to his fee lying ready on a table by her bedside and said, "Take that, and depart, sir; I will physic myself. You cannot cure, and I can but kill. I am as safe in my own hands as yours."

He took his hurried departure, telling Susannah as she closed the outer door upon him: "The recovery of Mrs. Perkins is impossible; I have exhausted the powers of medicine upon her."

Red-eyed, Susannah went upstairs to be told, "My child, dry your eyes. We are well rid of him and his boluses. Go ask your father if he hath "Owen's Dictionary of Medicine." I will study that, and with the blessing of God relieve myself one way or other."

Obedient Susannah procured the book, propped up Mrs. Perkins in her bed whilst she read, and read, and thought over her own symptoms, then bade Thomas procure certain medicaments, and gave orders for her own treatment.

Punctually and efficiently were those orders carried out, but life trembled in the balance, and there came an hour when even she surrendered hope and her own will.

It was night and only Thomas was there. She called him to her side.

"Brother Tom," she said feebly, "God's will is stronger than mine. It is useless to

fight any longer. The end is approaching close. Put your hand under my mattress. You will find a bag of silver there. It holds about ten pounds, all my long illness hath left to me. Take care of it, and if ever Sam should come back from the wars share it with him. I have under my pillow what will serve to sustain or to bury me."

But they did not bury her. Much to the amazement of Dr. Davison, whose interest in the extraordinary case attracted him thither as a friend, despite his abrupt dismissal, that night proved the crisis. Five weeks later Thomas had the pleasure of handing her into a sedan-chair for an airing, the blinds being drawn down to protect her weak eyes from the glare of the summer sun. For some days after that she lay reclining on the settle in the house-place, or sat in the cornered-chair by the open casement to inhale the breath of her garden flowers, whilst Susannah came and went, adjusting her pillows, shading the light, or preparing their simple meals as if she had been a younger and most loving sister. Then when she was fairly on her feet again did Thomas hand her back the remnant of her hard-earned savings, to be replaced by her in the small inner box of the great coffer.

And not until then, when she was able to use a pen herself, did William learn the

struggle there had been against the universal enemy under that thatched roof in Bearward Lane, or what a comfort and a treasure Susannah Finch had been to her.

William had then been fully three months a father, and her congratulations on his happy match had an addendum of felicitation on the presence of another Catherine in the family, the naming of the child after herself being taken graciously.

Moreover the same letter told that Mrs. Perkins would be no longer able to sit continually spinning at her wheel, and so she was about to embark in the drapery trade. She had learned sufficient of the business whilst living with her aunts at Swithland, and if her capital was not large to begin with, it would grow, no doubt.

"No doubt at all!" was William's exclamation as he read the letter aloud. "Whatever Catherine takes in hand is sure to succeed!"

Did he forget that she had taken matchmaking in hand which had *not* succeeded?

CHAPTER XI.

HOW TIME FLIES.

And now Time spreads his pinions for a flight through years, yet drops he feathers from his wings in flying, some white, some black, some golden, feathers we must gather in a sheaf as a memorial.

Let us walk up the Bull Ring or down the High Town and note the new sign swinging prominently out above the bookseller's shop by the gateway; it marks an epoch in William Hutton's prosperous career.

"The Paper Warehouse!"

He has made a leap at once from the retail to the wholesale trade.

The paper-maker with whom he has hitherto dealt, Thomas Bage, he had known of old in Derby as the son of a paper maker at Darley, and having both a like leaning towards literature, what more natural than their trading together when, in manhood, each had a business of his own. Thomas Bage,

the paper-maker (we should say manufacturer in these days), who was his own commercial traveller, made a point of spending an evening with his friend and customer whenever he made his periodic visits to Birmingham.

Generally reversing the ordinary rule, Mr. Bage smoked his pipe and drank his ale, and talked over trade, or old times, or new books, on the hearth of his customer; but coming when wee baby Catherine was but six months old, and scarcely the size of a respectable doll, consideration alike for the little mother and the little miss, transferred the pipe-smoking to the "Bell" in Philip Street, close at hand.

However time might deaden sensation this was a memorable spot to William Hutton, for there he had been entertained at the cost of the bellows-making workmen when friends were far and few, and his need was sorest.

Yet the voice of the past was silent, as he sat in the well-sanded commercial room with his friend Bage, waited on by the son of the host and, half-choked by the fumes of other men's pipes, listened to the voice of the present.

A tempting, alluring voice it was, promising profits and prosperity undreamed of if he would only embark in the paper-trade on

a larger scale and supply the town. Some hazy project of the kind had floated through Hutton's mind years before in conversation with his sister, but here was a tangible offer made to him of a large stock of paper which he might either sell upon commission, or purchase upon credit.

He thought it over, "Nay, nay," said he, "I'll have no dealings on commission, and I'll not run in debt. I can spare a couple of hundred guineas, and as far as they will go, I'm open to deal. But you must bring your prices down for cash."

Then followed calculation, and deliberation over samples, sizes, and prices until finally Mr. Hutton hurried off home round the corner to take counsel with his wife, and if she approved return with the money.

He found her with one foot on the rocker of the wooden cradle where slept her babe, her busy fingers fashioning a tiny frock, and she ready to listen and assent.

He still kept his cash in the old oak desk. Unlocking it, as it stood in the corner on its shelf, he opened a bag containing his hoard of gold, and in his haste to count the two hundred out, dropped two or three of the guineas on the bottom of the desk.

One of these rolled away under the compartments sacred to letters and papers, and

was not to be dislodged. In order to ferret out the coin he brought the desk to the light of the candle on the table and shook it well.

"The coin is surely bewitched," said he; "come hither, Sally, and put thy little hand under, mine is too large."

Into the long space beneath the shallow pigeon-holes went her small hand. "I do not feel the guinea," said she, "I only feel some papers. It may have rolled or slipped behind them when thee shook the desk."

In one of the upper compartments, along with the dingy leather cover of a child's ball lay the old silver-hafted knife, tarnished and blackened with disuse. It had slipped to the front with the shaking.

"Ah!" cried he, "I'll soon dislodge it," and opening the picker, which turned stiffly on its hinge, and doubled the length of the knife, he raked the space with the bent rod, and brought forth a long paper packet, yellowing with years, and his guinea also.

Both ends of the packet were sealed. It was endorsed in the handwriting of his Uncle George, "Papers belonging to Mr. Webb, not to be meddled with."

"Ah, that would be to keep Aunt Ann's fingers off. Doubtless, uncle thrust them back to hide them. Some day I'll look what they are. I cannot stop now."

And off he went to clench his bargain with Mr. Bage, first putting the paper back hurriedly, and others of his own loosely after it, with one of his lightened money bags, locking the desk as a matter of course.

He had put the knife out of his hand on the table behind the desk and left it there.

The displaced desk offended Mrs. Hutton's sense of order. She rose to replace it, saw the knife and took it up. "This is a singular knife, and seemeth of value. William hath surely left it out by mistake." She closed the picker and saying, "I will put thee away here for safety," placed it within one of the two small uncarved drawers, which at some remote period must have been added as wings, and lifted the heavy desk back to its shelf in the corner.

William had venerated Mr. Webb in his life-time, and revered his memory; had treasured his keepsake, had pasted "King Charles's Golden Rules" within the lid of his desk, and ordered Vill to copy them on a card in his best text-hand for suspension on the wall of the lad's little room. It was impossible to forget the old gentleman altogether, but in fourteen years associations which no one shared were likely to have weakened, removed as he was from the scene where the dead man had been known, just as we walk

in and out of rooms where hang the portraits of long departed friends, and only now and then observe their presence, or send memory lingering back.

So in the excitement and hurry of clearing and shelving a room for the reception of his new stock, arranging it and advertising the "Paper Warehouse" duly, William Hutton scarcely gave a second thought to the papers he had dragged to the light, and thrust back into darkness to await his attention at that "more convenient season," which never came.

Yet hearts had grown sick and weary with waiting for the revelation that small packet of sealed-up papers could have made.

So did Dr. Deering's odd pamphlets and loose manuscript notes lie undisturbed in the unused saddle-bag, but they involved no interests but his own, and might bide their time.

It is a decided advantage to be the first to introduce any commodity. William Hutton was the first bookseller in Southwell, the first and only paper merchant in Birmingham. And, to say nothing of printers, the demand for paper in a town producing numberless fancy articles requiring careful package must have been great. He began to feel the need of extra assistance. Patience, who had come

begging to be tried once more, had been reinstalled in the kitchen, to release Mrs. Hutton for superintendence of the shop and library; and though she taxed the forbearance of her very particular mistress many a time and oft, she did better now there was a clearer head to do the thinking, and she had only to carry out instructions.

Still the work pressed heavily on all, and William was contemplating the taking of a new apprentice or an assistant, when a greater change came about, a change that was at once a loss and a gain.

His wife lost a good uncle and he a tried friend by the death of hasty but good-hearted Francis Grace, whom they mourned sincerely, though they gained by his death not merely two hundred pounds to supplement Sally's original and undervalued one hundred, with a supply of plate and linen, but the power to add the hosier's premises to their own.

The "Golden Stocking" sign was taken down. The family was transferred to the Gateway, whilst the whole of the old premises was absorbed by his flourishing book and paper trade, and became indeed the "Paper Warehouse," as his sign imported.

Then, too, Catherine Perkins, who had erected a home for her brothers and self, was called upon to surrender steady-going Thomas

to help forward the fortune of his elder brother, and perchance secure his own.

Did she pause or falter at the new proposition? Did she hesitate, remembering how lonely she would be if illness again overtook her? No. Her religion was pure and practical; she never stopped to palter with principle or duty.

Week by week she stood in the open Market Place displaying her drapery goods on a stall with a sort of moveable penthouse covering, not merely advising her customers, but dictating what they should buy, influenced no doubt by a desire to sell that which was suitable and serviceable rather than the merely fanciful and useless. And, the buyers being mostly of the poorer class, it was her wont not merely to fix an arbitrary price from which there was no departure, but to adjust the payment by instalments according to some standard of her own, so as to press lightest on those whose means were smallest. She was a stickler for punctuality of payment, though never hard on an honest debtor; and stood there behind her stall as proudly independent as a peeress in her own right. She served many, owed nothing, oppressed no one. That she was respected goes without telling; for though her decisive manner might be marked by eccentricity, her upright-

ness, firmness, and promptness commanded esteem.

Hers was a high standard of duty; she did not live for herself alone. So there was neither grumble nor sign of dissatisfaction when William offered his brother a home and a respectable salary as his assistant; she rejoiced openly at the brightening prospects of both brothers, congratulated the book-lover on finding congenial employment, but said little or nothing of the loneliness of her own future.

As she had done for the other so did she for Thomas; advancing the money for an outfit becoming to his new station (in order that he should neither compromise his brother nor himself by his appearance), adding thereto cash for his journey by carrier—and something over.

She had already turned the old frame-room into a ware-room or shop for her drapery, where custom came to her, although not in the heart of the town; and so, maybe her solitude was broken up by the very coming and going of those she served. Then she was strict in her religious observances, was rapidly drawing Susannah Finch into the same groove, and so was not wholly companionless.

Nay, when some eighteen months later old

Mr. Finch opened his shop, and his snuff-box, and his eyes for the last time, and little more was found than would pay his debts and the cost of his interment, Mrs. Perkins gladly offered a home to the young woman she had designed for her brother's wife Again the wheel went merrily round, and the wife who had repudiated her husband, and the maiden whose love had repudiated her, made life less empty and unsatisfactory for each other.

The same year that carried off the old bookseller closed over the grave of the elder William Hutton, in the churchyard of All Saints', Derby, and for a brief and saddened day brought together sister and brothers. They had at least the satisfaction of knowing that his shortcomings and his sorrows were alike over, and however he had failed in his duty as a father towards them, they had done what they could to smoothe the later years of his life, William in particular having raised him from the depths of poverty to such respectability as his habits would admit.

But if the bony figure with the scythe was busy mowing down the old, Lucina was as busy as Mors, and William Hutton, nursing and fondling his sons and daughter by his fireside, transacting business that turned paper into gold, having a steady and methodical brother, and a bright intelligent apprentice

alike devoted to his interests, and a social circle gathering round to whom he was something of an oracle, to say nothing of the multiplied hundreds of guineas in reserve, had his cup of bliss brimmed to overflowing.

But even in the cup of bliss there are dregs. The loving though undemonstrative little wife, of whom he was at once so fond and proud, was beginning to droop, although she was the last to admit her own delicacy. Whether in her desire to prove a worthy helpmate to her husband, and to leave him no cause to institute unfavourable comparisons between his wife and his redoubtable sister, she had overtaxed her own strength, or in her extreme devotion to her children she had sacrificed herself on the altar of maternity, the effect was the same.

There might perchance be another reason. She was clear-eyed, and she might be troubled by the effect of unceasing prosperity on her husband.

His paper trade was flourishing, his bookbinding had called a second press into use, the chief literary and scientific men of the town and neighbourhood resorted to his shop, and yet he was not content. The faster his capital increased the stronger became his desire to reduplicate that increase.

He had said to her one evening, as she

nursed her youngest boy by the fire, in their cheerily appointed sitting-room.

"I do perceive that more profit doth arise from the new trade than the old. Blank paper doth speak in fairer language than printed. One can only furnish the head, the other lines the pocket. If paper payeth the seller so well, it must pay the maker better. I would I had a paper-mill at work."

"Prithee, William," she had answered with a troubled expression in her clear eyes, "leave *well* alone. Be content with thy present gains. Thee can *buy* and *sell* with the best. Thee knows nothing of paper-*making*. An ignorant master is at the mercy of his servants. Besides, thee dost not surely covet the paper-maker's profit as well as thy own! Thy friend Mr. Bage hath as much right to live on his gains as we, my husband."

"Aye, aye, my love," assented he.

But for all that the idea took root and was not to be blown down by the feeble breath of a woman, though that woman was his honoured wife.

He was not content with saving in the year thrice the money he had formerly done, but hankered after more: possibly the many hundreds lying idle in his desk suggested the desirability of turning them to account.

Eight or nine months later he said to his

wife one night when adding to his store, "See my dear love, here are seven hundred and seventy-seven pounds lying like the talent the man hid in a napkin and buried. He who hoards benefits no one, not even himself. The coins are round, and should circulate round."

Then after a pause, "I cannot employ all mine in my present business, there is no Birmingham banker to deal with my store for mutual advantage. It therefore becomes needful to invest in some safe concern, and I seriously incline to build a paper mill. I am no longer ignorant of the manufacture, I have studied the subject, you are aware. There is now land to be had at twenty shillings an acre on Handsworth Heath, whence I first beheld the beauties of this wonderful town. And there can be no dearth of water since Rushton and Evans diverted Hockley Brook to supply their rolling mill. What is thy opinion?"

"Nay, William," responded the prudent little wife, then knitting a sock for wee Catherine in the summer twilight, "I gave thee my opinion last year. Why ask me when thy plans are all laid out, and as it appeareth settled? Hath Thomas or thy friend Ryland been consulted? They would be more skilled to deal with such matters."

He had consulted them both. Thomas making out a bill of parcels on the old desk

which stood upon legs of its own in what was now the warehouse, lifted his quill for a moment, and scratched his forehead with the feather-end as if to scratch out an idea.

"What new maggot's bitten you now? 'Leave well alone' is a safe motto. You know where you are now, and what you have. If you put your guineas into brick and mortar, and your bank-notes into a paper-mill, you may see none of them again. And where will you be then? If you want to invest and become a man of property, why not buy these premises and become your own landlord? That would be safe and sure."

"Ah, Thomas, you are one of the old Hutton stock, always for 'safe and sure.' If I had never ventured I should never have had the means to invest in anything. Mr. Ryland is in favour of the paper-mill. I can buy these premises at a future day."

"Well, fair and softly goes far in a day; we shall see where your new hobby will carry you."

And that was all the encouragement he had from Thomas.

Nevertheless the land was taken on a long lease, plans were drawn, and the building commenced.

When the building began, worries began. Unless he was there to overlook, the builders

slighted their work, or neglected it. Coming and going wasted his time, and called him away from his legitimate business, and but for steady-going Thomas, and Mrs. Hutton, and even the boy Vill, it would have suffered greatly.

He found it necessary to buy a horse to carry him to and fro, and one day, the beast being almost lamed by a stone in his shoe, he was reminded of the knife in his desk, and the picker it held, so into his pocket it went once more.

CHAPTER XII.

JAUNDICED.

By the time William Hutton's fine mill was built and in working order, he was pretty well tired of his new project. He discovered that to make any business succeed the master's presence was essential, and that as he was not ubiquitous, either mill or warehouse must suffer.

He could rely on Thomas for anything requiring unremitting care and attention. But though he could take an order and see that it was duly executed with precision and punctuality, he lacked the active energy, the tact, the ready tongue, the courteous attention which had made the book shop and library a resort for the leading intellects of the town. Vill would have been a much better substitute for his master had he been older, for he had all the briskness wanting in Thomas.

Another apprentice was obtained, another assistant hired for the rough work, but they required training, and only added to their master's annoyance. The serenity of his

temper was disturbed. He had less time to spend with his little darlings, and the children missed his fondling and caressing. It had been his wont to carry the three about in his strong arms at once, singing or chirruping to them lovingly. Now he had barely time to snatch them up and kiss them hastily as he came or went about one business or the other.

Then sickness entered the happy home. Sharing and affected by all the petty worries and vexations of her husband, with all those of the wife and housekeeper superadded, Mrs. Hutton (who had never been favourable to the mill scheme) became the victim of jaundice, that sickly saffron biliary complaint induced by fretting and worry, and though the medical skill of the period exhausted its remedies —Dr. Ash being called in to supplement the old surgeon's opinion—her life for a time seemed to hang on a thread.

Barely could William Hutton rise from his despair to rejoice in a favourable change, and indeed before the bright canary colour had faded from the eyeballs, skin, and nails of his enfeebled wife, when his two year old namesake had a sharp struggle with death—and death was victor.

Before the clock had done its daily round a baby-brother was born. A little coffin and a cradle were filled in one day.

Had not misfortune done its worst? Nay, ere the anguish-stricken mother could do more than sit up in an easy-chair by the fireside, one by one, little Thomas, Catherine, and the new baby William were attacked by that horrible disease which makes its mark where it does not kill.

Can it be wondered that tender-hearted and emotional William Hutton, overwrought by his grief and many cares, in the end collapsed and became as yellow as one of his own guineas? Doctors may insist, as Dr. Dowler did, that jaundice is not infectious or contagious; but given the action of the same troubles other husbands and wives have taken it, and would take it in succession as did this pair in the old Gateway.

This may seem a doleful record, but it is historic, and not to be slurred over. No doubt it was a check to the prosperous man. If so it was salutary. Success is a steed ever apt to bolt with its rider.

It served, moreover, to bring out the sterling qualities of Vill and Patience. Those of Thomas needed no test.

The woman, whose mind was given to wander in regions of speculative perplexity concerning her future, roused from her dreams to the practical duties of the present, concentrated all her thoughts and energies

on the restoration and comfort of the sick, with as little discomfort to the healthy as possible.

She had from the very first impressed on Vill the debt of gratitude he owed to Mr. Hutton for his rescue from beggary and misery; and now out of business hours early and late she had a willing coadjutor ready to undertake any service that would leave her free to wait upon her mistress, or on the little ones when they in turn were on the sick list.

Wee Catherine had been his especial plaything all along, now he devoted his spare hours and his ingenuity to the amusement of all three; and when only two remained to be amused and kept quiet during convalescence he carved wood into toys to keep them quiet, and put snippings of coloured leather and millboard to like use.

One morning in this later period, William Hutton, sad and depressed, passing through the warm kitchen noted little Thomas seated on a high chair by the table pulling to and fro by a string a small square of cardboard with a bit of broken pipe-stem fastened loosely as a roller underneath.

He looked on for a moment or two, commended Vill for his ingenuity, and went away to tell his brother Thomas they would soon

have a substitute for the ordinary wheelbarrow. In a couple of weeks there was a small handcart at the door, smartly painted to attract the attention of the market people and other beholders to its *pair* of wheels. Ere long the useful conveyance had many successors in the town and elsewhere, for the notion spread, even to the mounting of boxes upon wheels, and the employment of dogs to draw them with their burdens of sand or stones, or crockery. Yet this precursor of the modern truck had only solid wooden discs for wheels, and many years went by before another genius adopted the spoked wheel.

Vill, watching his stout fellow-apprentice, Pat, dragging the novel invention from the door with its load of packing-paper, said he "admired it mightily," all unaware that his master's quick apprehension had taken a hint from the bit of cardboard he had mounted on tobacco pipe for a child's plaything.

Indeed he had little leisure to think of anything but the crowd of work on his young hands, for now his beloved master, overborne with grief and many harassing cares, was himself laid on a sick bed, and dosed with boluses that might have well physiced a horse.

After a long struggle he came to the light again, shrunken, hollow-cheeked, yellow-

skinned as his wife had been, but eager to resume his place at the head and front of business. No sooner was he strong enough to take the air on horseback than he mounted the saddle, hoping to "dispel vapours" and set his mill-wheels in motion by a ride to Handsworth Heath.

His aspect was certainly unhealthy and cadaverous. People met him and shook their heads, or whispered one to another that "Hutton was going to his long home," but only one man had the ill-feeling to make the remark in the sensitive man's jaundiced ears.

That man was the little malevolent bow-legged tailor who, sitting on a bench by a roadside public-house called the "Trees", with an ale-can in his hand, shouted after him jeeringly, "Eh, Mester, it's never surely thee! Whoi, tha's getten thi fortin' in thi feace neaw. It's th' varry colour o' thi brass, mon. Owd Scrat 'll have it afore long, fur thah't ridin' to th' devil as fast as thah con. Theer's luck fur thee!" and he set up a coarse laugh at his own speech as if it had been a rare jest.

The hill was steep and William riding slowly. He heard every unfeeling syllable, but he answered never a word, though the man's laugh followed him like the gibe of a mocking fiend.

"Why should that fellow regard me with so much acrimony? Is it the tribute indolent envy pays to industrious success? Only an evil mind rejoices at another man's illness or misfortune. I hope, please God, to cheat the enemy this time in spite of Tommy Green. The sting of a gnat may irritate the skin, but can do no harm beyond."

So cogitated the rider as he pursued his way to the new paper-mill, more disturbed by the incident than he cared to acknowledge even to himself, for the gnat seemed to be buzzing about his path whithersoever he went.

Never did the lazy tailor pass the thriving shop and warehouse in the Gateway, whether sober or in his cups, but the home truths spoken years before by his fellow-traveller stung him like thorns pointed and poisoned by conscience. His spleen found vent in galling epithets bawled in at the open doors, or under the windows.

"I'd have that drunken fellow put in the stocks if I were you," said Mr. Ryland to his friend one day.

"Nay, sir," was the reply. "To fetter the limbs expecting to cure an abusive tongue would be foolishness. I should show the man I was vulnerable by the restraining act."

"You are too placable by half, and I think

your 'prentice here is of my mind," said the other with a nod of the head towards Vill, whose eyes were flashing with fiery indignation.

"Aye, sir," assented Vill, then a well-grown youth about sixteen. "If I had but my will I'd roll the fellow over in the mire. It is not fouler than his tongue. I fear he will do the master mischief some day if he hath the chance. He threatens oft."

"Hard words break no bones, and threatened men live long," was all the heed William Hutton gave. But his placability had half its root in timidity. He was afraid the man would publish his original condition to all the market if he interfered to punish his abuse, and gave him a day in the public stocks.

But as he rode back from his mill, annoyed at the shameful and shameless neglect and dishonesty of workpeople during his illness and absence, and was saluted with a like volley of jeers as he repassed the misshapen apology for a man still drinking in front of the "Trees," he was more than half inclined to repent his own clemency and forbearance.

Moreover, when he reached home he gave expression to his opinion, and that in the hearing of Vill, whose compressed lips and eloquent eyes spoke if his reticent tongue did not.

Jaundice lingers long in the system, especially when the bile is stirred up with fresh annoyances. Though he was much in the saddle William Hutton's restoration to health was long delayed.

"Suppose thee was to take a journey to Nottingham, change of air and scene might serve thee well," suggested his good little wife. "Thee hast not seen thy sister since thy marriage. She may think I keep ye apart, and hold me in disfavour. It is not good to sever the family bond. So I prithee go see Mrs. Perkins and bear her my assurance of respect. Thomas and Vill can surely manage the shop and warehouse in thy absence."

"But the mill?" her husband suggested apprehensively.

"Thy health is of more value than the mill," she replied. "Thy absence for a few days cannot make things there worse than they have been."

A heavy sigh marked his concurrence.

Then the little woman, carrying her baby on one arm, regardless of her own debility, busied herself in preparations for his journey. Patience hunted up the discarded saddle bags, the papers were emptied and carefully parcelled up by Vill for preservation, and the very best of William Hutton's wardrobe was

selected and examined before packing in the well-brushed bags. A spot or a speck on broad-hemmed ruffle or falling neckcloth was a disqualification, equally so a darn on his black hose. His best suit of new mourning also went into one of the bags, economy enforcing the common axiom that under a great coat "anything was good enough for travelling."

The roads were muddy, owing to a storm the previous night; but the sky was clear and fresh after the rain, when, about eight on the Saturday morning before Michaelmas, William Hutton kissed his wife and little ones on the doorstep, and mounting his steed, rode away with pistols in his holsters, and saddle-bags swinging on either side, well wrapped in a riding-coat that might have been made for some one else, so shrunken was his wasted form.

He took off his three-cornered hat to salute Mr. Perry, who was hastening down the High Town, evidently on some pressing business, and keeping to his right up Dale End, passed with a smile the door of the stockinger who had offered "a penny to be shut of him," and so on up Coleshill Street and through Saltley, where he lingered to admire the prospect, little wotting what a hubbub his departure had created.

It so happened that Mr. Perry's lazy and tippling journeyman, who seemed to have no settled home, and who should have been at work on his master's shop-board a couple of hours, came sauntering unsteadily up the Bull-Ring that morning as frowsy as if he had spent the night in a stable or hayloft, without sleeping off his potations. He was just in time to see Mr. Hutton set off equipped for something more than his daily canter, and to send his customary small shot after the rider.

He flung up his arms with a derisive shout, "Eh, lads! sithee wheere he goes! Mester Hutton! Mester! A foine Mester! Eh, thah preawd upstart, thah's forgotten thi trampin' days, an them as thah tramped wi'—d—n thee! The beggar's on horseback neaw, ridin' to Auld Nick as fast as he con, da——"

Before the last denunciation left Tommy Green's parched lips, an indignant blow from the arm of Vill sent him off his unsteady feet sprawling in the mud. The youth had been standing in the roadway to hold the horse's bridle, and his long bubbling indignation had boiled over.

"Lie there, you idle vagabond. How dare you abuse my good master! He doth you no harm. You're always railing, and I'll not stand and hear it quietly any longer. The poison of asps is under your tongue!"

A crowd was gathering. Though it was not the market proper, Saturday always brought hucksters and others into the Bull Ring with their wares Tommy Green and his proclivities were well known. And cries of "Bravo young un?" "Hey for th' 'prentice as stands up for his master!" "Hurrah! Bandy-leg's down, sarve him right!" and so on, the sympathy all going with the youth who had tackled a public nuisance. Tommy Green with an effort scrambled to his feet, and made a dart at Vill, only to go down again before the younger arm.

In his wrath as he strove to rise he had spluttered out with a plentiful garniture of blasphemy, "Eh! thah beggarly parish 'prentice, I'll gie it thee when I'm on my pins agen! Thah come to th' town i' rags, an' neaw thah's as preawd as thi mester! Thah meddlesome foo', I'll knock thee into a cocked hat ere——"

Measuring his length in the mud a second time did not abate his fury, or silence his tongue, and no doubt had he been firmly upon his feet, Vill would have stood small chance against pugilistic Tommy Green.

But at that moment, when Mrs. Hutton stood with clasped hands and pale face upon the doorstep, her children clinging to her skirts and crying in terror lest Vill should

come to harm, Mr. Perry, Tommy's master, had come upon the scene.

So rapidly had it all passed, and so loud had been the man's vociferations that from the outset they had reached his ears. He was already in a rage with his journeyman for leaving urgent work unfinished on the previous day, and was not better pleased to find him unfit to ply his dexterous needle, and assailing a good customer.

The overseer was well known. The rapidly-gathered crowd made way for him. He caught the shop-board deserter by the collar angrily, and dragged him up, saying "Is this the way you serve your master, you lazy villain? Insulting his customers and brawlingin the streets. I'll teach you better this time. Hie! constable!"

The constable, already advancing, laid his hand also on the man.

There had been other spectators of the scene: Mr. Ryland coming to inquire if his friend had gone, and the occupants of Mr. Baskerville's carriage, which emerged from the Gateway just as Vill repulsed the tigerish tailor and bore him down for the second time.

Excited and violent, Tommy Green was dragged before a local Justice, a living testimony to his own demerits. Mr. Perry and Mr. Ryland (both of whom commended Vill for his championship of his absent master)

followed, impelled by widely different motives, to weigh the scale down against the disreputable tailor, and in less than an hour he occupied the seat of repentance in the stocks at the end of the Bull Ring; no one having imputed blame to *his* assailant.

There he was flouted and jeered by lads and men, aye and women too, and but for the guardian presence of the constable with his staff of office, he might have been hardly used, humanity is so prone to assert its own virtue by lashing the exposed vices of others.

There had, however, been one sympathizer even with Tommy Green, a masculine woman with one queer eye and a hare-lip.

She had heard him rail against William Hutton, had formed one of the crowd, had caught at Vill's right hand and held it for a moment's scrutiny, then dropped it with a discordant laugh that caused Vill to turn round and recoil from the face he recognized in spite of time and change.

This woman heard the vindictive anathemas of the man in the stocks without a shudder, patted him on the shoulder, and when he had shouted himself hoarse, offered him a pocket-flask as a stimulant and a consoler. The way to his heart lay down his throat. They literally swore friendship on the spot. The league was not an auspicious one for Vill or for his master.

CHAPTER XIII.

VILL'S DIVINITY.

A PROUD characteristic of the Englishman of to-day is "pluck," the unhesitating, unflinching courage to dare and to endure. In the last century it was "spirit," the hot-blooded impulse to resent an insult, avenge a wrong, or defend the helpless there and then, whether with the sword or the Briton's natural weapon of bone and muscle. Peace was not in the ascendant, and peace-lovers were a scorned minority. Thus the unpremeditated act of the youth in striking down the taunting reviler of his master and himself met with ready recognition and open laudation.

He had held the bridle of his master's horse only an attentive apprentice; he had struck down a half-tipsy tailor in his hasty zeal, and straightway was dubbed "a lad of spirit" and "a brave boy," not only by the unthinking crowd, but also by the magistrate and his own master's friend, and came back a sort of hero.

It was a sad damper to his heroism to be

met almost on the threshold by the rebuke of his pallid mistress in quicker tones than ordinary.

"Soh, thou art here at last. Whither hath thy rashness and indiscretion led thee? Thy duty lay *here*, not in street brawls. Thinkest thou thy master is advantaged by thy act? Thy blow hath made an enemy of the man, and he harmed not thee."

"He is always abusing master, and I could stand it no longer," was his answer.

"Thy master hath heard the maligner many a time and oft, but he hath let the matter pass like idle wind. Thy Saviour was reviled and scoffed but he answered not again. It ill becometh thee to be so ready with thy blows."

Vill stood there bareheaded and abashed, though still panting with excitement and flushed with the applause of others. He had met with blame where he had expected commendation. Rarely was the voice of his mistress raised in reproof. When it was, it had all the more weight. Never before had he felt it so crushingly. It changed the aspect of the whole affair, dwarfed his heroism, vulgarised his prowess—and what was worse, did it in the sight and hearing of two young ladies, the ward and niece of Mr. Baskerville.

It was some balm to his wounded spirit to hear the former, a black-headed, black-eyed

beauty not yet sixteen, interpose in his defence.

"Nay, nay, Mrs. Hutton, would you have the young man stand tamely by whilst a vagabond insulted his master and himself? Commend me to the warm, generous blood that reddens in the cheek and nerves the ready arm to strike down insolence or oppression, not the milk-and-water that curdles in the breast and turns a white face meekly to the smiter. That is not the spirit of the Carews."

Her proud young head rose higher involuntarily, and her sensitive nostrils quivered as if all the chivalric blood of her ancestors was throbbing there in sympathy with the crest-fallen apprentice's resentment of the insult. Once or twice her companion had twitched her sleeve as a check, but in vain. Cordelia Carew had been encouraged to think and speak for herself from very early years. Her mother had died young, and the fond father, for whom she still wore mourning, had set her in her mother's chair and trained her to be a companion for himself, rather than educate her to the pattern of the period.

Mrs. Hutton, who at the same age had been expected to preserve decorous silence in the presence of her elders, might have told the young lady so, had not prudence suggested the unwisdom of offending the wealthy ward of

her husband's best customer, even then in the warehouse with Thomas selecting paper alike for printing and package. She replied, with deliberation and some accession of quiet dignity :

"We Friends regard not such matters in the light of the world."

"Mr. Hutton is not a Friend," put in Miss Carew promptly.

"No, miss, but he is a lover of peace, and would suffer wrong rather than provoke contention."

"Then he is like to suffer it, for contention doth come unprovoked. No snapping cur came barking twice at my father's heels. But see, Rebecca," to her friend, "here is your uncle ; we must go."

Vill, in his shirt sleeves and apron, was by this time behind the counter, setting the old press in order for the day's work.

As Mr. Baskerville passed through wearing a gold-laced hat and velvet coat gorgeously betrimmed and buttoned, with shoe-buckles of new device elaborately parcel-gilt, he nodded kindly to the youth in whom he had taken an early interest, and said with a smile :

"Well done, my lad. The master is well served whose 'prentices are jealous for his reputation. They who eat a man's bread are apt to be the first to scorn him."

"I should never do that, sir. I honour my master," answered Vill, again flushing at the word of approbation, though it was far less sweet than the impulsive and spirited interposition of Miss Carew.

Thomas had followed the gentleman from the warehouse above, and when he and the two young ladies departed in the wonderful carriage, said to Vill with composure:

"Mr. Baskerville tells me you have knocked down a drunken man for shouting after your master. If my brother had been in danger, your ready fist might be of service. But I'd advise you, Vill, not to be so hasty in taking up other folk's quarrels, or you will have your hands full. It is best to keep cool."

He had kept cool, having gone from the door into the back warehouse as soon as his brother had his first foot in the stirrup, and never troubled himself what the noise in the street was about. But for Mr. Baskerville, who had entered full of what he had seen and heard, he would have known nothing. He listened calmly, and as I have shown, advised only quiescence.

Amid the conflict of praise and blame Vill's thoughts wavered between the rebuke of Mrs. Hutton, and the proud estimate of the young lady, to centre at last on the latter, which was

to the natural Adam fragrant as incense, intoxicating as wine.

At sixteen youth has ever some unapproachable divinity to worship in the secret soul, and Miss Carew, who for three months had come with her guardian, or with Mrs. Baskerville, or her niece when books had to be exchanged at the library, or the "Lady's Magazine" was due, had been the goddess of his adoration.

Other misses of fifteen came and went in the wake of mother or friend, but they were sometimes shy, sometimes simpering, sometimes pert. Miss Carew was in advance of her years, self-possessed, frank, and decided, but without a shadow of familiarity or boldness.

Her impulses were all warm and generous, she would have spoken up for the veriest beggar as she had done for Vill. He was to her simply Mr. Hutton's apprentice, who stood behind his master's counter and gave her requirements respectful attention; she had never bestowed a second thought on him apart from his place. In vindicating his conduct she was actuated solely by a sense of justice, since, according to her views and training Mrs. Hutton's censure was neither just nor generous.

The trifling incident might have passed from her mind had not her guardian himself

noticed the young fellow in the shop, and after returning to his elaborately painted carriage —a sort of overgrown, top-heavy sedan upon wheels—reverted to the subject, giving Miss Rebecca Marston an opportunity to recount what had passed in his absence, and to reprove the unladylike interference of her younger companion.

Miss Carew was not accustomed to be so called to order, and resented it accordingly, Mr. Baskerville, who had much to say in praise of Vill, giving the verdict in favour of generous impulse against cool calculation.

There was a little "tiff" between the girls in consequence, and thus one way or other the bookseller's handsome apprentice obtained undue importance in her mind—at least for the time being.

It might have died out had not Rebecca chosen to twit Cordelia with her "championship of a 'prentice lad" when any girlish difference occurred between the two, which was not seldom. And though the latter maintained her right to defend the defenceless against injustice, she began to couple Vill with a feeling of annoyance rather than of admiration in any way. There was a wide gulf between Miss Carew of Carew Mount and the youth who waited her commands behind a shop-counter.

Of this no one was more sensible than Vill, and never more so than when, intoxicated with her praise and her proud beauty both, he remembered with a shudder that Peg Harris was his aunt, and that she had recognized him from the singular mark on the back of his hand; a mark as if the skin had been drawn down in the middle and given a twist that had become permanent.

The tailor's taunt of the "parish apprentice" was scarcely so hard to bear as a claim of affinity by that repulsive and disreputable woman.

He had been well treated and instructed by his master and mistress, was rising rapidly in esteem and favour, was comfortably clad and housed, and, altogether, was sensible he was the envy of half the 'prentices in the Bull Ring. The privations, squalor and ill-usage of the vagabond life in Charnwood and Derbyshire were rapidly vanishing into the background of the past. He had ceased to dread the reappearance of his supposed kindred. Had thoroughly identified himself with his master's family, was a big playmate of the children, always as ready to cut out and carve wooden toys for them as to invent or repair some article of domestic utility for Patience or his mistress. Indeed, at one time he narrowly escaped disgrace with the latter whose fine

sense of neatness would certainly have been offended had she happened to see the litter of chips he made in his little bedroom whilst privately carving a couple of wooden figures to adorn her mantelshelf.

In the kitchen his good friend Patience Jolly swept them away with never a word, but had Mrs. Hutton chanced to make a tour of inspection whilst the corn-chest, which served for a table under his small window, was all in disorder with wood, knife, chips, and the floor had its sprinkling too, the quiet woman would have been roused to disquietude and have said more than he or any one else might have liked.

Fortunately some one else made the first observation.

At night Vill found a slip of paper under his incomplete figure. In his master's hand he read—

> "Vill, our apprentice, is no dunce,
> He needeth only telling once;
> Except in scattering things unheedful,
> Then to tell him it is needful."

The doggerel did its duty. He coloured as he read, conscious that he did leave about many "things unheedful" besides chippings. He could appreciate the good nature of the private hint, and though he accepted it in silence, took care it needed no repetition.

Silence of that kind had become habitual to him. It had been forced upon him in his wanderings with the Fields when an incautious word to a stranger meant danger to liberty or life of those who held him in thrall. And though frank enough when he acted on impulse, he was reticent when he had a pause for reflection.

Had Mr. Hutton been at home he would most likely have straightway told him he had seen his Aunt Peg. To no one else there was she known, and to no one else did he care to mention her. Before Mr. Hutton's return he had another motive for holding his peace, and the brilliant star of beauty seemed to rise higher and higher in the unscaleable heavens.

Francis Field had waylaid him on his way to post a letter to his master.

The old Post Office in New Street was simply a room in a two-floored dwelling-house, having a private door up a couple of steps, adjoining which in a fictitious door was a very diminutive window, where letters might be posted or inquiries made, the lower half opening for the purpose. A sort of low outbuilding clung to the side of this, in which the sorting of letters might be carried on, whilst a pair of low wooden gates shut in the stabling for post-horses, and afforded a good view of St. Philip's in the extreme back-ground.

As Vill made his way, letter in hand, up New Street he observed a man with a wide-brimmed slouch hat well down on his brows leaning over one of these gates, evidently watching the people who had business at the Post Office. He passed, mounted the one well-worn stone step, and gave in his letter deliberately, as a matter of import. There was no irreverent pitching of letters over people's heads into a gaping hole, no slipping of them carelessly into a mere slit.

As he stood waiting for the missive to be taken in, he was startled by an unforgotten voice calling "Bill!" in an imperative tone.

His heart seemed to stand still. In a flash he had coupled the voice with the man behind the gate. His feet might have been rooted to the step. He hesitated whether to take to his heels but remembered how fruitless that would be.

"Bill!" came to him more imperatively, and he heard the hinges of the gate creak in opening. He turned his head. "Why did you not come when I called you? Have you forgotten your father since you ran away?"

The youth's face told that he had not, told, too, that the authoritative call and the claim of fatherhood had not lost their effect.

"Scarcely," said Vill, quitting the step but not advancing too near.

"Where is your mother?"

"I do not know. I have not seen her for many years."

"Humph! You have heard from her then?"

"No, I have not."

"Do you expect me no believe this?"

"It is true."

"Then she is as unworthy the name of mother, as of wife!" He seemed to watch the effect of this outburst. "You knew she was at Bromsgrove?"

Vill hesitated; he did not care to be thus catechized, and was afraid to injure her by any confession.

"You need tell no lies. I know she was there. Whither did she go?"

"I have no idea," replied Vill, for once thankful he was ignorant. "But I cannot stay here talking, I must go back to my master's."

"You will stay here as long as I like," and a grip like a vice was laid upon his wrist. "I have but to say the word and you have no master. There is no father's signature to your indentures, I could claim you at any hour."

Vill looked dismayed. He knew not how far Francis Field spoke truly.

"You seem in fine feather. Have been living in clover whilst your father has been half starving? What cash have you?"

Vill felt in his breeches' pocket. He had threepence.

"Bah!" cried the man, with a look of scorn, "That is no use. You have more at home."

"A little," assented Vill, thinking ruefully of his small hoard of savings.

"Well," demanded Field, authoritatively. "Bring what you have to me under the Gateway at eight o'clock to-night, or beware the consequences. It is a son's duty to help his father. And keep a still tongue in your head, or it will be the worse for you and your master likewise."

Thus enjoined, Vill was allowed to depart, which he did—at a run.

CHAPTER XIV.

A VAMPIRE.

Of Francis Field's misdemeanours Vill had no knowledge whatsoever. He had a shuddering remembrance of his savagery and brutality, and of poverty and privation, with an interval of better fortune; and he had a general belief that he was a bad man, founded on the taunts of Dolly when the pair quarrelled. But he had fortunately been brought away young; years of comfort had blunted the keen edge of recollection, and left only a general impression.

Brought face to face with him once more, Vill noted no signs of abject poverty, although he had the air and odour of one given to hang about stables. He had, however, spoken of starvation and demanded money.

Vill had rushed home through the Swine Market, almost tumbling over a big black sow in his haste, and again coming in sharp contact with Pat and the hand-cart under the shadow of the Gateway, so great was his bewilderment.

His wages were still merely nominal, but so

were his uses for money. Being fed, clothed and provided with books by his master, at the same time being kept much indoors by his artistic and inventive hobbies, he was preserved from contact with a spending set. In fact, he rather looked down upon the general run of apprentices in the Bull Ring and High Town, saying they were a "queer rough lot." He had fallen into the hands of people who fostered his natural instincts for propriety and respectability. From Patience upwards he had been indoctrinated with the principles of a living Christianity, and, not inconsistently, with the principle of thrift. Encouraged by precept and example he had saved, little by little, first by pence, then by sixpences and shillings, between five and six pounds. He had floating in his mind an inchoate idea of making a start for himself at some future time, and introducing improvements in decorative book-binding.

What a knock-down blow had Francis Field dealt to the lad's castle by the demand for money and the threat to remove him from his master!

Was it true he had the power to annul his indentures? Had his father a right to his earnings? Was it his duty to hand over his savings to a father who had been only a brute to him?

He was sociable but never loquacious. That day he was more than usually silent, even at dinner, and with the children. He attended customers, cleared the counter, and overlooked Pat's first attempt at "folding," with an air of peculiar abstraction.

The questions he had asked himself revolved over and over in his mind, and refused to be settled.

"Oh, how I wish master was here, that I might ask him. He knows all about my father," said Vill to himself. "I cannot tell Mr. Thomas, I should be ashamed to own him, though he is my father. Not that I care much for his threats."

But he did care for the threats, and in order to set his mind at ease put a case to Mr. Thomas that afternoon when they were alone together in the warehouse.

"Mr. Thomas," ventured he after cogitating awhile, "is a father's signature necessary to a boy's indentures?"

Thomas Hutton, deliberately removing the excise stamp from a ream of writing-paper for counting into quires, answered without looking round,

"Yes, if he hath a father."

"Suppose the boy's other relations bound him in his father's absence; could his father cancel his indentures when it came to his knowledge?"

"We—ll, I'm not sure, Vill, but I think he could," replied the manager, proceeding to turn up the corners of the sheets for counting. "Why do you want to know?"

"Oh, something set me thinking." Then after a pause, whilst he shaved the edges of some sheets in a press, he asked curiously, "Could *my* father, after all these years?"

"Art tired of thy master?" and Thomas Hutton's head went over his shoulder with a droll look upon his face.

"Oh, dear no! Just the reverse."

"Then don't bother thy head about thy father, he's too great a vagabond to care about thee. And he's not likely to show his face to folk who know anything of his doings about Nottingham with his comrades, Harris and Tom Booth." So saying, Thomas resumed his counting.

Vill was silent. Was there some disgrace attached to his father? Was that the motive for the injunction to be secret. The bare suggestion made him draw in his honest breath.

He released the screw of the press, removed the clean cut sheets, and placed another pile in the press, then asked, as if half afraid of the answer: "Who were Harris and Tom Booth?"

"Rogues and deer stealers both," came from Mr. Thomas with an approach to briskness.

"Harris was hanged, and Tom Booth ought to have been, though he did die in his bed."

Not another word said Vill. His heart sank within him. All his high hopes and aims seemed to wither in an atmosphere of shame. He had struck down Tommy Green for calling him a parish apprentice. Now he heard from lips that never lied that his father was a vagabond, the comrade of rogues and deer-stealers. How could he ever look in the face of Miss Carew again? Would she have uttered a syllable in his defence had she known his origin? He could not hope it.

Then came the other problem to perplex him. Was he bound by filial duty to such a man?

In that age no commandment was more rigidly enforced than the fifth. The honouring of parents and superiors was inculcated alike from the pulpit and in the household. Francis Field had terrified him into obedience. William Hutton and Patience had each in peculiar way taught him his duty to his master, and even before she changed her name Miss Cox had led him to understand why and wherefore he owed a duty to others before himself. And now she was the steady light illuminating and warming William Hutton's home, he saw how love and reverence was expected from little Catherine and Thomas, aye and rendered by them.

"I know," he argued with himself all that afternoon, "it is the duty of a good son to help his parents to the best of his ability; and if mother were in distress I should be ready to help her; but surely such a father as mine cannot claim it. He was never kind to me. Master loves his children, kisses and caresses them. I seem to remember being kissed and petted when I was quite a little thing, and living in a large house. But that is all very dim and faint. Perhaps my father was unfortunate and lost his property, and that soured him, for all I recollect clearly are kicks and curses. Ah, that must be it, but he was kind to Frank; he was never kind to me. Surely I cannot be required to hand over all my earnings to a man I neither love nor respect. Yet Patience told me when old Mr. Hutton died how good master had been to him though he had never done his duty to any of his children. It is clear master did not consider his father's misconduct absolved him from performing a son's part. I have heard him say how thankful he was he had been enabled to smooth his father's latter days, and that he had no neglect to reproach himself with. If I could only be certain my father was really in distress, I might feel differently. He spoke of starvation. Well, it would be a sin if I kept

money hoarded up and suffered him absolutely to want."

And so on, and so on, until Pat put up the shutters about eight o'clock, and he was released for an evening stroll. A few yards and his walk came to an end. Under the dark shadow of the covered Gateway, beneath the very chamber where slept the innocent children of his good master and mistress, the tall figure of a black-browed man in a broad slouch hat awaited him.

"Soh! you are here. It is well for you. How much have you brought?" was his salutation.

"Half a guinea, and I hope——"

"Half a guinea?" interrupted Francis Field with contempt. "Half a guinea? I could spend that in a night."

"If you do, you may well be in distress. It has taken me more than half a year to save," replied Vill with some spirit; his indignation overmastering his fears or his sense of filial duty. "No one throws money away under my master's roof. He says that 'waste brings want.'"

"Hang your master and his maxims too! I must have more than this. You have more, and by right it is mine."

"Yes! I have more, but none to waste. I have brought that to relieve distress, since

you said you had been starving, not to fling away in a night."

Field found that Vill was not altogether the soft metal he had expected. He changed his tactics to work upon his feelings.

"Aye, Bill, and I have been starving. Wandering here and there without a home or a shelter since my wife deserted me in the hour of my deepest sorrow, and carried you off with her. I may have seemed a hard father Bill, but I had a harsh father too. He gave me a gentleman's education, and kept me without a shilling to spend as a gentleman. He flogged learning into me, and rebellion at the same time. If I took to wild ways, it is at his door. Educated people would not associate with me, I had neither dress nor money to recommend me. He had married beneath him. I sank to the level of my mother's kith and kin, they welcomed me. They supplied the pockets my father left empty. How, is neither here nor there. I married beneath me as he had done for a pretty face and some one to love. I had repeated his blunder. The pretty face had smiled on other sweethearts before me. Thy master for one. The busy fingers that might have earned a living for both on her lace cushion could do nothing besides to make a home comfortable. I had taken her

home. Her thriftlessness and sauciness enraged my irritable and penurious father, and he turned us both adrift. Then came the poverty you may remember, and my heart hardened against even my own flesh and blood. I made one or two attempts to retrieve the past, but fate was too strong for me. When Frank died and my wife deserted me, carrying you off, I grew reckless and desperate. Now and then I have had a run of luck, but I have been driven from place to place, at times ready to gnaw a bone like a dog, and glad to kennel upon straw like a dog. No one to care for me or stick to me but Peg. Last night I slept in the Post-office stable. You have found me the means to lodge better for a night or so, but not to make a start afresh. See what you can do for me by to-morrow night, Bill, and don't forget if I was hard to you I was driven to it."

There was a strand missing from this twist of fact and fable, the dark line of his own misdeeds from boyhood upwards. Vill, listening to the plausible narrative, was not able to detect the embodied lie. He had not heard the story told by Dolly to his master, and consequently could institute no comparison.

He could only note the vehement bitterness with which the overflowing stream of wrongs

was poured forth, and feel moved thereby. The living rillet of truth gave force and confirmation to the lie of which it formed an inseparable part.

Vill had warm feelings and generous impulses. His heart softened towards the being whose life had been blighted by father and wife alike, and he was led to dip deeper and deeper into his small store for the man who called him "son," and traded on his claim to paternity.

Once impressed with the belief that Francis Field was more sinned against than sinning, he was prepared to excuse or to overlook the brutal treatment of himself, and to feel it was his bounden duty to surrender the money lying idle in his box.

Yet was he loth to part with it, so many inchoate projects lay with the coins, and in parting with them he felt as if he was giving away the fortune he had meant to achieve in the future.

Slowly, very slowly had his little store accumulated. He knew something of the value of money, no doubt over estimated it by its scarcity, and he was not so certain of the recipient's verity as to pour it forth in one abundant largesse. Field complained that he doled it out in driblets.

Be that as it may, the constant drain, the

frequent calls for secret meetings harassed and disquieted the youth, and made him silent and abstracted. Even little Catherine, his pet, complained he "took no notice of her," and three-year-old Tom had to solicit the pick-a-back rides formerly volunteered.

Mrs. Hutton herself remarked to Thomas and to her husband when he returned, that "Vill was very much altered since his encounter with the abusive tailor."

The cause was suspected by no one. His master had not been home three weeks when Vill's last coin went into the greedy palm of Field. It went reluctantly, for Vill could not realize the inability of a strong man to obtain work, but still it went. He had been told an exaggerated story of an injured shoulder which had nearly cost him an arm, and consequent inability to perform heavy manual labour, whilst his shabbiness and want of friends precluded clerkly occupation.

The lad had nothing more to part with, except his weekly wage, and that would have been far too small to satisfy the vampire's cupidity had he not had some ulterior object in view. But then, with many a profession of regret for depriving his newly restored son of his inadequate earnings, and an asseveration that he was scouring the country in search of employment, barely keeping soul and body

together as he wandered through miry ways from farm to farm, or town to town, he drained the dutiful listener of his last farthing, turning up every two or three weeks for the purpose, and making his presence known to the strained ears of Vill by a preconcerted signal not to be overlooked.

And so the winter sped, a winter notorious for the robbery of peaceful travellers throughout the Midlands. But at length even Vill's credulity was exhausted, and he was no longer disposed to be cajoled out of every shilling.

It was then, when Vill declared his inability to meet any further demands, and suggested that an able man should find some means to earn his own living without crippling his son, that Francis Field made a proposal that filled the upright soul of the apprentice with shame and horror.

CHAPTER XV.

BEYOND TEMPTATION.

From the first Francis Field had professed to be struck with the insufficiency of Vill's weekly wage, reflecting on the meanness of the master who required his apprentices to labour through lon ghours for his sole profit. But Vill had his answer ready.

"I am better off than other 'prentices in the High Town. If I do work hard, so doth master. I am neither starved nor beaten, and I have good clothes."

"And never a shilling to spare for a cock-fight or a dance? Never an hour for a game at base-ball, or bowls, or nines?"

Vill shook his head. The motion was not seen in the gloom of the Gateway, but the silence was sufficient.

At every stealthy meeting Field dilated on glorious sports from which Vill was debarred by want of time and money.

It was on the last of these occasions, when he fancied he had at length wrought on the

youth's ambition to be free and take his pleasure gaily, he said quite paternally—

"Poor Bill! Your master's a keen one for his own ends. He knows how to grow rich on the labour of others. Works you like a horse in a mill, and never lets you have a taste of life or enjoyment, lest you should grow discontented with your slavery and run away as he did from wearying drudgery when he was a 'prentice."

"*Mr. Hutton run away!*" Amazement and incredulity were in the exclamation.

"Aye, Bill, and helped himself to his master's money to run away with. And I don't see why you should not help yourself too. You've the run of the warehouse and the till, and no one need be the wiser if you did pay yourself for your own hard work so as to have a few shillings to spend, or to help your distressed father."

Vill stood literally aghast. Speech was impossible. He heard his good master vilified, and himself incited to commit a robbery almost in the same breath, and was dumb with horror. It was not alone that he was urged to perpetrate a crime, but that the tempter was his own father, and had imagined him capable of the treacherous wickedness.

There was a bright moon shining in a starry sky, and its silvery rays lit up an angle

of the flat-roofed Gateway ; but the darkness beyond, where stood the twain, was thereby intensified, and so the shrinking expression of Vill's face was lost on his evil counsellor.

He took silence for consideration—hesitation—consent. Crime had no repulsiveness for him ; he did not conceive it should seem monstrous to another. Lawless from his boyhood, he had been encouraged to think it a bold and manly thing to defy the law. He had had one or two sharp warnings, and more than one interval of honest compunction, especially after his father's death, and might have retrieved his character had not Peg held over him the whip of his early deeds. From his second plunge he had never emerged, and now there was in his mind the settled conviction that all men would be dishonest if they had the opportunity, and that only cowardice and fear kept them otherwise.

So he took Vill's petrified consternation as a voiceless leaning towards acquiescence.

Vill's breathless "Rob my master?" did not enlighten him.

"Aye," said he, "follow his lead, and pay yourself ; or if you like it better, tell me where he keeps his desk, and leave the doors unbolted. No one will be the wiser. You shall have a fair share of the gains and I'll trouble you no more."

Vill had found his tongue. "Are you the fiend incarnate that you would tempt your own son to villainy so deep? Keep back, or I will cry aloud and denounce you to the first comer. Did you think the slanderous lie you told of my good master would embolden *me* to be a *thief?* It has served to convince me only of your own blackness. Well might my mother flee from you. Thank God she did and bore me with her! You have made her motives clear as light. She rescued me from infamy and I honour her for it. You made my childhood miserable, you would make my manhood hideous. Father though you be, I owe you neither love nor duty, and from this hour I disown you. All gratitude and love are due to the upright man I serve, and it shall be my care to protect and defend his property, not filch it from him."

Vill's honest blood was roused. His words poured forth like a torrent and kept the other at bay.

At the mention of his wife and her desertion Field had winced and shivered, and then a smothered curse like a growl escaped him. But ere Vill had done he forced a laugh, and would fain have persuaded the young man that he was but testing the metal he was made of.

"I would not have you take a straw that

was not your own," he said. "But shake hands, Bill, I leave these parts to-morrow and would fain part friends."

It was too late to attempt cajolery.

"Never!" cried Vill decisively, throwing his clenched right hand sharply behind him. "You have tested my metal for your own base ends, and you hear how it rings. You have stripped me of every sixpence I could call my own. I gave it ignorantly to help your imaginary needs. But I know you for what you are now; and you shall not strip my master of his property, or me of my good name."

Disguise or pretence was no longer possible. Inwardly cursing his own precipitance, he hissed with low vehemence, "Harkee, youngster!" and Vill thought he heard the click of a pistol, "I've half a mind to send a bullet through your insolent young brain." Then with an awful imprecation he went on, "Do you fancy yourself able to preserve your master's property, or your own good name, whilst I or Peg have wrongs to avenge. I demand from him the wife I was fool enough to love and marry. *He* could tell where she is hid away. But *your* good name," with a sneer, "you lost *that* when you came to meet me here by stealth, and let money pass between us in an open thoroughfare. There is no spot too dark for observation; you have

not come or gone unseen, so beware, my fine game-cock, you may crow too soon?"

The shame, the agony of Vill it is impossible to describe. He went in and crept upstairs to bed saying to Patience, as he slipped off his shoes, he "had a headache," but rejecting the soothing posset she kindly offered to bring him.

During all their vagabond wanderings Dolly had done her untrained best to keep the children from contamination; and, except when her anger got the better of her discretion, breathed no syllable of her husband's evil deeds in their presence. There was no disguising the brutality of his moody fits, or the blasphemy of his tongue, but when she hurried the surviving boy away from the "wicked people," he had no conception of deeper depths of wickedness. Indeed, his abstract notions of right and wrong were wonderfully vague when he providentially fell into better hands to learn the fundamental principles of religion and morals. His master, Patience, and the gentle niece of Mr. Grace had each done something towards his training. And however various their methods, the united result was high principle and integrity. It may be old Mr. Webb, though mouldering in an unknown grave, had done something for him too, for through him had come "King

Charles's Golden Rules" to catch Vill's eye with each returning day.

Esteemed and trusted by his master and mistress, beloved by the children, noticed by Mr. Baskerville and other frequenters of the Gateway, he had almost forgotten there were undesirable relations in existence. He was ambitious and he was proud. His own master, and the great Mr. Baskerville had alike risen from small beginnings. He had an ambition also to rise; but he was too proud to owe the elevation he sought to any dishonourable act. He had dared to raise his aspirations higher still, even to the beautiful heiress, Miss Carew, the immeasurable distance between them being but a stimulant to raise himself little by little nearer to her level. That he was not much over sixteen goes for nothing; it is just the age to indulge in visionary schemes for the future.

The shock he had received from Tommy Green's taunt was a mere fillip to that which had wrung his heart on hearing from Mr. Thomas that his father was a vagabond consorting with rogues. That too sank into insignificance before the dread discovery made that night of his utter degradation.

"My father plan a robbery, the robbery of my kind good master, who hath taught me all I know, and shamelessly expect *me* to be his

accomplice. It was monstrous! It was terrible! How shall I survive the disgrace? How can I look Mr. Hutton in the face again? He never names my father. He may know more to his discredit than even Mr. Thomas doth, and in the goodness of his heart spares me the hearing. Did the maligner think to deceive me with his vile falsehoods about my master? And oh, how familiar he spoke of theft, as if it were no crime. He said I had hazarded my good name in only meeting him. Can he then be so notorious? Oh, my God, what shall I do if people point to me as the son of a common thief?"

So ran the tenor of his thoughts and inner questionings as he turned and tossed on an uneasy pillow, his head truly aching and throbbing with unutterable woe.

Unutterable! Aye, that added to the intensity of his agony. He could not confide his trouble even to his master. He could not turn informer and brand his own father as a robber. He could not set the hounds of justice to hunt his parent down, however vile he might be. And if he did he had no proof to bring. Might not the same plea serve of a jest to try his fidelity? But what of the threat held out of breaking in, and throwing the odium on himself? What should he do? If he could but tell his master and take counsel with him.

All night he lay awake turning from side to side, moaning in his pain, and envying the repose of his bed-fellow Pat, who seemed asleep as soon as his head rested on the chaff pillow.

Morning found him heavy-eyed, weary and unrefreshed, but up and about his business betimes, as if he sought by extra diligence to atone for the iniquitous suggestion of his father.

William Hutton had returned from Nottingham re-invigorated with the change of air and scene, and with a complexion nearer its normal tint. His little wife still continued languid, as if her system had received a shock not to be overcome. Her own enfeebled condition made her more readily alive to signs of indisposition in others.

"William," said she to her husband that forenoon, whilst he was preparing for his daily jaunt to the paper-mill, already found to be a costly edifice; "hast thee observed what a change hath come over Vill of late? He seemeth restless and disturbed, and when he hath gone out to breathe the air after business hours, hath come in with an aspect of weariness and melancholy, as if he had a mind ill at ease. Patience telleth me he came in last night with a sad headache, and hath had no sleep. Dost thee think the lad is sickening for jaundice too?"

"Nay, Sally, did not Dr. Dowler tell us jaundice comes of overmuch anxiety and grief. Vill hath no cares to trouble him."

"Be not too sure of that. The lad is proud. He hath never overcome the shame of Tommy Green's reproach that he was a parish 'prentice. It seemeth to weigh him down unduly. And thee knows that wounded pride is hard to bear."

"More likely Vill hath fallen in love," quoth William Hutton, drawing on his own early experience. "All lads of his age do, and all have melancholy fits, sometimes arising from humours in the blood. I'll speak to Dr. Dowler as I pass, and ask his opinion. Mappen after all the lad hath only overgrown his strength. He hath shot up marvellously of late."

"Yea, do. Meantime, Patience shall brew him a pitcher of balm tea, 'twill dispel feverish vapours and relieve his aching head," said the kindly mistress, ere her husband made his way through the door of communication to the business portion of the premises.

His old desk mounted on legs stood beneath the window of what had formerly been his sitting-room, and was now the back shop. He unlocked this, and took thence a small bag of coins for payment of wages at the mill, and having relocked the desk, came forward into

the shop bag in hand, which he stowed away in a capacious breast-pocket whilst saying a few words of kind-hearted inquiry to Vill, concerning his general health.

Vill stoutly denied his supposed ailments, and made light of his headache and sleeplessness. But his eye chancing to light on the small bag of money ere the open pocket received it, he stopped short, hesitated, and then said frankly, pointing towards it—

"Well master, truth to tell I have been anxious, and *there* is the cause. If you would only have your desk or your money removed into the house for safe keeping my mind would be relieved. All sorts of people pass through the back-shop to the upstairs warehouse, and through the little window may see you handling your cash and where it is kept.—I cannot keep guard over it when busy; and the charge weighs on my mind."

"Ah, that may be so," remarked his master meditatively. As a swift after-thought he asked curiously: "How doth that account for thy sudden headache yester-eve?"

Vill drew in his breath, then answered without more than a moment's pause, "Well, sir, there are people about who owe you no good-will. And only last night, as I came under the Gateway, I heard one man say to another, 'Tell me where he keeps his desk.'

I came in all in a fright, thinking 'the desk' might be yours."

"Hah! Should you know either of the men?"

"I only heard a voice, sir. It was too dark to distinguish faces where they stood. It might be only fancy, sir, but—but I wish the doors were more secure; and—and, if you do not mind, sir, I will sleep on the counter for a few nights, to keep watch. It may be only fancy, but—pray master, do remove your money to a safer place."

"Thank, thank, you Vill, for the suggestion, I will see about it. Habit hath blinded me to the indiscretion of keeping cash in my desk. Prudence doth not offer a premium to roguery. There ought to be a bank in Birmingham where money and valuables might be lodged. There hath been one in Nottingham for many a good year. Keep a wary eye, Vill, on the folk who come hither whilst I am away, and let no stranger pass upstairs to the warehouse alone."

His horse waiting at the door with Pat in attendance gave a short neigh of impatience. In a couple of minutes he was in the saddle riding off towards Handsworth Heath in any but a comfortable frame of mind. He was easily buoyed up, easily depressed. Vill's communication had sounded a note of alarm

that presaged ill for the business of the day, and set him thinking.

"Remove my money, saith the good lad. Ah! he little guesseth how that money hath dwindled of late. My mill scheme hath tended more to loss than profit, as Thomas foretold. I have exchanged coin for care—a bad exchange. I fancied myself competent for the undertaking. My workmen fleece me boldly, and laugh in their sleeves at the ignorance which prevents me from checking their peculations. They think it a rare joke to strip the rich ass of his saddle and bridle, and count on slaying him for a share of the hide. But the ass hath a mind to save his skin, whilst he hath a kick left in his hoofs. It behoves thee to look about thee Will Hutton, with rogues plundering thee at thy mill, and rogues seeking to plunder thee at thy warehouse. But haply. Vill hath let fear outrun the danger."

CHAPTER XVI.

BEFORE THE DAWN.

So pondering over the roguery of others, the cost of his newly erected mill, and the possible hankering of thieves over the contents of his desk, the would-be paper maker jogged along at an easy pace As he reached the upper end of Bull Street he chanced to turn his head towards the premises of Evans, the Quaker stockinger, where he had met with his first rebuff in the town just twenty years before. Naturally his eyes lingered in passing the adjoining shop—that of the friendly overseer who had done him a good turn as an inhabitant. It was one of the very few remaining of the ancient order, having open fronts. There, in the doorway, stood Mr. Perry to exchange a cordial "Good day, sir," and there on the shop-board, full in view, sat Tommy Green at work with his bow legs across, and grinned at him so maliciously as to take all the savour out of Mr. Perry's greeting, and set him wondering if the turbulent Lancashire tailor owed him an extra grudge for his day in the stocks,

and coveted the coin he was not sober or industrious enough to earn for himself.

Involuntarily he urged his horse forward; a fresh impetus had been given to his disquietude, and when he reached Handsworth Heath and his mill he was in no frame of mind to brook what he conceived to be unfair dealing.

He expected his workpeople to know all that he ought to have known, and did not. An ignorant master cannot decide fairly on the qualifications of the man he engages, and if he chance to employ self-opinionated incompetence plus his own, the product may be disaster without actual knavery. So it might be in his case, though he imagined otherwise. At all events he rode up to the mill, threw the reins to a lad, and dismounting passed leisurely and observantly through the dust of the rag-sorting room, asking questions as he went; then on through the pulping room, and the moulding, pressing and drying rooms, to find things in a state of general muddle and disorder, all going wrong and no one willing to bear the blame. The books of the overlooker were a hopeless labyrinth. That which might be the result of united negligence and incapacity William Hutton regarded as part of a deliberate system of over-reaching. Peculation there was without doubt.

Irritated and disgusted by all he saw, and all he suspected, he at once, in his chagrin, ordered the work to be stopped, payed off and dismissed the workpeople there and then, and heedless of grumbling or discontent, locked up the mill and rode homewards with the keys in his pocket grimly congratulating himself that the ass had saved his skin before his bones were picked altogether bare.

Nevertheless, he did not relish the confession to his wife and brother of the utter collapse of his paper-mill scheme, since it would be an acknowledgment of their greater foresight.

"Well," said Thomas, "it's no more than I expected. I warned you to make no more haste than good speed." But never a word said Sally of reproach or upbraiding. There was no "I told you so," either on her tongue or in her eyes.

All she said was "I am pleased thou hast thought well to close the mill. Thee will be more at home and more at ease. It is never too soon to stop a leak. The loss may be thy gain in the end."

He did not see it at the time, but to guard against further loss took the precaution to remove his diminished hoard to the safer keeping of a bureau in his own bedchamber, leaving behind only a small sum for genera. purposes.

But when weeks went by without any attempt being made on doors or windows, he began to think Vill had been apprehensive without cause. The latter had betaken himself to the hard counter for a bed, and again lay awake, listening, thinking, and contriving how best to keep out ill-disposed men, not falling asleep until the light of day peeped in at the eyelet-holes of the shutters.

In the morning he made a sorry litter of chips upon the kitchen hearth whilst little Tom and Catherine looked on, curiously asking what he was making, not satisfied to be told "Lay-holds for meddlers," he was generally so ready to answer their inquiries.

After breakfast he went to his master with one or two long pieces of wood in his hand, the one sliding over the other under straps of leather. "See, sir," he began eagerly, "I have managed to contrive a bolt to baffle a thief. This bit of cardboard represents a spring; it would work thus," giving a demonstration. "You see it would slip easily into the socket, but could neither be slipped nor forced back from the outside. You might put one on the upper door, sir, where it would be out of sight in the daytime, and secure both doors at night—so. Any one looking over our half-door can see where the bolts are fixed and how poor they are, and that the lock is not much better."

"Ah, this doth appear a clever contrivance, Vill," answered Mr. Hutton. "You seem to have quite a knack for invention. We must get it made."

"Well, sir," replied Vill, eager to secure his master's property, and to serve a friend, "I know a blacksmith's son who is a clever workman at all sorts of things. He would make it for me and not charge much."

"And who is he?"

"Why, sir, his name is Jack Cotterwell; his father used to work for Simon Onions, the bellows-maker in Digbeth till he set up a forge for himself, for which he made his own bellows. I dare say you have seen them at work, sir, for the smithy is open to the road. It is the old black-and-white place with the pointed front, where they shoe horses, and stands by itself."

"Aye, I know the place. The smith is a good workman. I recommended him to mine host of the 'Garland.'"

"Well, sir, it was through taking Trotter to be shod I came to know Jack. He is good-natured and hath made one or two little things for me."

"Ah! Catherine's pretty toasting-fork and Tom's spade, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then if your friend Jack hath the skill to

carry out your ingenious device I will pay him fairly for his work. If he succeeds, and it answers, there may be a demand for more."

So likewise thought the young smith. "I say, Vill, I wish I had thy headpiece," he said, when the strong, square spring bolt was completed. "I could make a fortune out of that thing."

"Then make it," was the prompt response.

"Suppose we go shares."

Vill laughed.

"Wait till the fortune's made."

The bolt was fitted and shown by Mr. Hutton to his more intimate friends as the invention of his apprentice. Orders went into Jack Cotterwell for others, and Vill was complimented on his ingenuity. He, however, got something more than empty praise, for honest Jack, who found a ready sale for the bolts, insisted on the inventor taking a fair share of the profits. So that in much less time than it had taken to accumulate the few pounds Field had drained from him, the sum was made up and overtopped. The man had sought to destroy the youth, and, unwittingly, had done him a signal service.

And whether it had got wind that Mr. Hutton's doors had been fitted with a newly invented bolt, or whether Field had really left the neighbourhood when he said, or whether

he cared not for the risk without Vill's complicity, there was no telling. Vill maintained his uneasy post as night watchman, sleeping on the counter, and starting up if a dog barked or a drunken man stumbled over the outlying steps, but he might just as well have taken his rest comfortably, for weeks and weeks went by without sign or token of any attempt upon the premises.

Indeed, William Hutton, who did not care to waste his money even on bolts and bars needlessly, became convinced Vill had made a scare for nothing.

He had not penetrated the arcana of Vill's fears, knew nothing of the secret lying hid in the breast of the young man, and poisoning the fountains of peace and hope. Had Field been other than his father he would have gone straight to his master with the whole story. But to expose him would be to bring shame on himself as the son of such a scoundrel; whilst to turn informer and bring his own parent to justice, if he was all the lad suspected, was repulsive to every feeling of his better nature. Yet he suffered a thousand shames and terrors lest Field should come forward openly and claim from him a son's duty and obedience.

"To tell his master would be to proclaim himself the son of a thief; to invite the finger

of scorn to point at him. Would Miss Carew condescend to speak to him then? Would not she turn away from him with contempt and loathing?" Such were the fancies and questions flitting through his brain for ever, unanswered and unanswerable. Though why he should single out Miss Carew as the representative of the world at large he did not ask himself.

Unaware how she troubled the sleeping and waking dreams of the bookseller's apprentice, the young lady came at intervals to the library, either for the magazines with Mr. Baskerville, or to wait for him, along with his niece, and would chat with Mrs. Hutton or with Vill himself, though never in such manner as to encourage familiarity. The distance between them was well defined and preserved. Yet Vill had once or twice of late fancied she regarded him with a sort of wondering compassion, and marvelled what it might mean.

She must have seen in his countenance the marks of pain, mental or bodily. Coming one day in June, when there was no one in the outer shop but Vill and little five-years-old Catherine, whose golden head barely rose high enough to bring her eyes on a level with the counter-top, she inquired after Mrs. Hutton, for whom she had brought a summer nosegay.

"She hath gone to Aston-upon-Trent, madam, for the benefit of her health, and to see her own family. Mistress hath not visited Mr. and Mrs. Cox before since she came to Birmingham. Master's own health was so much advantaged by his journey to Nottingham last autumn, that he determined to try if her native air would not be of like service to her.

"Do you expect Mrs. Hutton to make a lengthy stay?"

"For some weeks, madam. I understand she will go on to Nottingham before she returns, to make the acquaintance of master's sister, Mrs. Perkins."

"Aye," put in little Miss Catherine gleefully, "and I am going next Saturday. Faver hath taken Tom to-day to see granmovver and granfaver, and to play in the fields, and eat brown bread and honey. Movver rode on a pillion behind faver, and Tom went on a soft pillow before him. An' I shall go on a pillow, and stroke and pat Trotter's neck as we go; and I am to feed the chicks, and see the birds, and bees, and butterflies. I shall be *so* happy!" and the little maid clapped her small soft hands delightedly.

"I hope you will, my dear; the country is most charming at this season. You may have a fine romp in the hayfields. It will do you good to roll in the hay."

"So faver says, but movver says I must behave proper when I go to see granfaver and granmovver. They would be shocked if I romp about like a boy."

Miss Carew smiled. "I fancy a little girl may run about a field after a butterfly without shocking any one. I ran about my father's grounds when I was your age and no one chid me."

"Did you?" queried Catherine, with wonder in her eyes. Then, *àpropos* of nothing, she broke forth with a nod of her sunny head, "I wish Vill was going too."

"Well, my dear," said the young lady, "no doubt he doth wish the same And I think, sir," and now she turned the light of her full black eyes upon him, "I think you require country air as much as others. For some time I have imagined you were suffering from ill-health. I am afraid the Swine Market in the rear affects the wholesomeness of these premises. There hath been much illness in Mr. Hutton's family during the past year."

What a sudden bound the heart of the young man did give! How the colour mounted to his temples, and chased the pallor from his cheeks! That Miss Carew should have deigned to notice any change in him was so unexpected, so far above his hopes or his deserts, he was

overpowered. His reply came almost stammering forth.

"Undoubtedly, madam, there hath been much sickness in the house, and when the wind doth blow from the west over the Market, the odour thence doth frequently compel the closing of windows. Yet we are accustomed to it, and with all thanks to you, madam, for your gracious observation, I do not myself feel any worse effect than an occasional headache. My health is fairly good."

Miss Carew looked as if she doubted the "fairly good." Vill turned to attend a new customer, and wee missie, mounting on a wooden bar behind the counter, took the young lady into her confidence.

"Movver said Vill was going to be sick, and she gave him some balm tea to make him well, but faver laughed and said he was only in love, or growing too fast. I heard them. What do you fink? I fink he must be poorly for he never rides me on his shoulder now. He says I am too big, and I'm not big, am I?"

Certainly she was not big, but she had put big thoughts into Miss Carew's breast with her artless prattle, and though she assented to the opinion that Mr. Vill (she knew him by no other name) had grown too fast, and was, perhaps, not strong enough to carry a little girl on his shoulder, she wondered if the

other conjecture could be true also, and if so, with whom was the tall and handsome young man in love? To be sure it was no concern of hers whether Mr. Hutton's apprentice was in love, or only over-growing his strength. But he was always so respectful and attentive, always had the magazines for Baskerville House aside in readiness, was careful to apprize them when new books were expected from London, or the latest music by Dr. Handel, or Mr. Arne, and was so well-informed, so polite, and withal so unpresuming, he seemed to belong to quite another order than the vulgar apprentices of other tradespeople. Nay, even set him besides Pat, his fellow-apprentice, and how marked was the contrast!

And thus the young lady argued with herself that it was not at all unnatural she should be a little, just a little interested in this uncommonly handsome young man in whom her guardian was interested, and who was evidently falling into delicate health or consumed by secret grief—love—or something else. At any rate, though she did not tell herself so, she was glad Rebecca Marston had not been there to share Miss Catherine's artless confidence, and that Mr. Vill had not heard.

And she was not sorry to see her guardian

step in to bear her away, before the little miss made any other revelation.

Six months had flown since the day when Miss Carew had "so far forgotten and demeaned herself as to defend the spirit of a common apprentice," as Rebecca Marston had phrased it in reporting the incident to good-natured Mrs. Baskerville, months that had carried the tall girl over the frontier of sweet sixteen, and not left Vill standing where he had been, though his age was, of course, conjectural.

The customer, a stranger who had asked to be shown a copy of the quarto "Virgil" printed by Mr. Baskerville, with the fine type he had himself designed and cast, had so engrossed the attention of Vill that Miss Catherine's commentary on his altered appearance altogether escaped him; but the kindly remark anent his health which had set the child's tongue wagging yet lingered in his ears like some delicious melody, which enthralling the senses held them as by a spell, and refused to be forgotten.

He sold the "Virgil" and put the guinea in the till in a state of bewildered ecstacy that lifted him out of the commonplace sphere of trade into a region where nothing having a taint of earth could enter; that paradise which the young and ardent and enamoured

alone realize, which the aged and desolate dimly remember with regret; and which the cynical and disappointed affect to despise.

That Miss Carew—Cordelia Carew—whose very name was music, who trod the earth with the arched foot, the firm free step, the lofty bearing of one born to command, whose large black eyes held sparks of living fire, could bend them upon him with the velvety softness of gentle compassion, of kindly interest in his well-being—upon him, the lowly-born apprentice, was a condescension too great for him to realize. It seemed to bridge the space between earth and heaven.

Alas! There is no paradise into which the serpent cannot creep. No lofty height can be ascended without dizziness—perchance a fall. He had taken his Icarian flight too near the sun, and down he came minus his wings, into the deep waters of despondency. "Compassionate—pity? Ah! such might the angels feel for the lowliest, but raise them no whit the nearer. Miss Carew pitied the poor delicate apprentice out of the abundant compassion in her breast, as she would have pitied a crippled beggar in the street, no more. He must be mad to think there could be more than momentary interest in her tone of sympathy. Would she even have accorded that could she but have known how base a

man was he who called him son? There were no stepping-stones between the son of Francis Field and Miss Carew. Yet no one could deny the lowliest born the privilege of loving and worshipping the highest in the depths of his own heart. And so he might worship her in secret and in silence. Yes, in *silence*. He would never lay himself under her feet to be scorned, that he knew well."

CHAPTER XVII.

A MEMORABLE RACE.

When William Hutton had gone riding into Nottingham for the Goose Fair of 1760, he was a mark for all eyes, and half-fancied the live geese assembled in flocks within the Market Place cackled and hissed the louder at his approach. There was no doubt that fingers were pointed at him, and nods and whispers not too low were directed towards "th' yaller mon" the lads ran to get a sight of.

The shrunken figure in the loose great coat, with lank and lemon-coloured jaws, and eye-balls slightly tinged with the same hue, who slowly dismounted at the door of the old house in Bearward Lane was quite another being from the fresh-coloured, sturdily-formed, brisk man of business Susannah Finch had last seen before her father's shop. There were lines of care or pain faintly visible upon his forehead.

He was evidently an invalid, not yet recovered; one requiring something more than

mere change of air. Mrs. Perkins again reverted to her infallible guide—"Owen's Dictionary," and the two women set about coddling him with kitchen physic, more than half-convinced that his wife had not taken sufficient care of him. Susannah sighed over the wreck he had become, and Mrs. Perkins made no scruple to ask "if the wife he had chosen for himself had equalled his expectations," scarcely, however, willing to credit his assurance that she was "the dearest and best of wives and mothers."

And when, after taking life easily for two or three weeks, riding hither and thither in the pure fresh air to Derby, to Aston, to Southwell, he went back almost a new man, they concluded he was happier with them than at home and doubted his praises of his "dear love."

Something of this he saw, and something of a desire to correct false impressions, and to convince them his little wife was beyond all praise underlay his proposal to give her also the much-needed benefit of fresh air and change of scene the following summer when he had thrown off "the shackle of the mill," if not all his troubles therewith.

He was proud of his wife, proud of his children; he desired to give both a treat, to bring the children before their grand-parents

and Aunt Perkins, but, most of all, he longed to prove to the latter how good a choice he had made.

There was now no difficulty about leaving his business on a Saturday to return on the Monday, seeing he had in Thomas and Vill two faithful and tolerably efficient deputies to leave behind. Mrs. Hutton, too, had by that time trained Patience to supply her place.

No one had, however, trained Trotter to carry more than double, consequently the family, going and returning, had to be conveyed by instalments week by week, as Miss Catherine had intimated to Miss Carew.

This, during the six weeks of Mrs. Hutton's absence, gave her husband occasion for as many pleasant journeys to and fro, and still more, it gave him an insight into his own wedded heart, and taught him how large a place the little woman occupied there and in her household. Coming back each Monday to a solitary hearth he missed not only her smiling face, but a thousand unobtrusive attentions he had accepted unawares. He learned, indeed, how much the happiness of his daily life depended upon her, and how deep and true his own affection had grown There was no weighing in the balance with guineas now.

In the first week of July, when her own

visit was drawing to an end, she received a letter which caused her heart to swell with full content and emotion, and she smiled as she read—

"I think the time of your absence very long, but lay a restraint upon myself that you, while you are out, may enjoy your friends with satisfaction. Now you are absent, I often wish I had drawn more sweetness from your company while I had it; but when I am blessed with it again perhaps I shall neglect it as before."

Had the business man some consciousness of neglect?

She was then staying with his sister, on whom she had made a wonderful impression from the force of contrast. She was neat and dapper in appearance, well-dressed, without a hoop or a particle of show or affectation; was quiet and self-reliant, as was the elder woman, but not self-assertive; she led suggestively, Mrs. Perkins dictatorially. She was as capable of self-sacrifice, but no one was made to feel it. There were many hard angles in Catherine Perkins' character, and more than a touch of eccentricity, but Sally Hutton was round and smooth, and soft as an Indiarubber ball, though as quick to flame if put to the fiery proof.

Then—wonderful recommendation to Mrs.

Perkins—she was never idle. Delicate health with her was no pretence for lounging with folded hands; they were generally at work with needle or knitting-pins, and there she was ready to take Susannah's place at the spinning wheel when other duties called the latter away.

Altogether she won a lofty niche in the esteem of Mrs. Perkins, and as for Susannah, she was all admiration and loyal devotion. If in her heart there lingered a reproachful thought of William Hutton's conduct towards herself, it was banished. She found in his wife a full excuse and apology for any change in him. And when the letter already cited—ostensibly a quaint record of mishaps on the journey home with four-year-old Tom—was read aloud she no longer doubted that he was happy in his choice. And she was generously content that it should be so. She had never yet seen the man to set up in his place, but she had ceased to repine at her voluntary spinsterhood.

William Hutton followed this letter before the week was out. It was the race week.

"I thought well not to miss the opportunity," he said. "One day more will not affect interests at home. I like the spirit of a good race, and I have not seen one since I left Nottingham. There was never known

such a race as is expected to-day. Never before were two such horses entered to run together as the Duke of Devonshire's Atlas and Mr. Warren's Careless. The two horses have beaten all others out of the field. The stakes are high, and the betting tremendous. There are fools of fortune staking all on the hazard of a favourite's hoof. Thousands will change hands ere night."

He would fain have persuaded Sarah to accompany him, saying that "the quality and fashionables of three or four counties would be assembled on the race ground, it would be a sight such as she had never witnessed."

But the old Quaker leaven was strong within her, and much to the satisfaction of Mrs. Perkins she begged to be excused. "Where so much is at stake," she said, "the worst passions of men are sure to be excited. Rank and fashion could not make it other than a sorry sight for me. I should think only of the wretched losers, and the misery brought to helpless women and babes by the recklessness of the men on whom they depend. I would prefer a quiet walk under the castle walls after the heat of the day with your sister or Miss Finch."

William felt a little twinge when she spoke of recklessness, for though he was no betting-

man and he knew she made no covert allusion, he was not altogether conscience-clear over his paper-mill. Without more ado he left the three women to pursue their own course. Before the day was over he was glad he had done so.

The Nottingham race-ground occupied the present site, to the left of the Mansfield Road, but the town had not then crept half-way up the hill, and it still formed a part of Thorney Wood, within the confines of the forest. There was no grand stand, and spectators who had no beasts to bestride betook themselves to the different hillocks to obtain a view of the two-mile course. Here and there an open chariot might be seen, but the vehicle was too new to be common, and betokened occupants of high rank or great wealth.

Horsemen and horsewomen there were in plenty, alike arrayed in gorgeous colours; the men with their gold-lace, gold buttons, brilliant buckles, and powdered wigs, satin and velvets, vieing with the ladies they accompanied. No modern out-door gathering could compare with it.

William Hutton, sober tradesman though he was, did ample honour to the town of his adoption in the size and number of the gilt-buttons on his plum-coloured coat and waist-coat, and the silver-gilt buckles with which

his friend Ryland had supplied his shoes and small-clothes; the wide three-cornered hat he lifted from his powdered head to passing acquaintance with newly acquired importance was not without its gold band. Even Trotter had been extra groomed for the occasion and showed a glossy coat that never felt the new riding-whip bought that day from Robert Tanner. There was an air of comfortable circumstances about the quadruped and his master both. So marked was the contrast between the prosperous man and the younger self who had in vain essayed to make a fair living out of frame-knitting that, among the scores of frame-knitters on the course not one claimed him as a friend or brother athlete of the old 'prentice days. It was from the better class shopkeepers of the town he now received recognition.

He prided himself he never forgot a face or a voice. Was it some haunting memory, presumption, or what impelled him to raise his hat—deferentially—to a lady and gentleman just come upon the course with a servant in yellow livery in close attendance? The scarlet hunting-suit of the gentleman scarcely attracted so much attention as the spirited animal he bestrode, or the remarkable resemblance between his handsome self and his feminine companion, who had a quieter mount.

Mr. Hutton remained uncovered until they had passed, receiving the barest acknowledgment of his bow, and catching the wind-blown voices asking each of each: "Who is that individual?" Ah! could they have known *what* he was to them how eagerly they would have rushed to greet him.

He had bowed respectfully to his sometime patrons Squire West and Madam, but they had not an inkling that he and the very humble bookseller of Southwell were one and the same. On they went to join a party of friends in a gaily painted chariot, whilst he from the elevation of his saddle surveyed the exciting and animating scene with more than his wonted serenity.

Besides the ordinary quota of horses, jockeys, betting and sporting men assembled round the scales and the starting post, there was the customary crowd of itinerant vendors of cakes, fruits, and drinkables; there were gipsies, mountebanks, quacksalvers and jugglers, a "Modern Colossus" in a travelling booth, a dancing bear, and fiddlers many, men with cocks for fighting or cock-throwing, wrestlers and cudgel players, in short, much in the way of popular sport that was not in the racing calendar.

As William sat looking calmly on the moving panorama after the first race, a familiar

voice saluted him with, "Hey, Hutton, art thou here? Give us thy hand!"

It was Joseph Roper, once his fellow apprentice and his rival, many years a trooper in the service of the king, now, owing to the death of his father and youngest brother, and thanks to the custom of Gavelkind which obtained in Southwell, the owner of a farm, a mill, and other goodly property, and a man of free and easy bearing. But, indeed, he had always been that. William had learned so much when, chancing to revisit Southwell the previous autumn, he had put up at the "King's Arms" and there encountered his old enemy. Love and hate have alike good memories.

Whether loving or hating, Roper had slapped him on the shoulder then and claimed good fellowship, proclaimed himself an old soldier, a man of the world who had outlived youthful follies, and had a dozen sweethearts or more since the days he had gone wild over Dolly Parker. Nevertheless he questioned William Hutton pretty closely, if in an offhand manner, about the said Dolly and what he knew of her, and William, not being of a reticent nature and thrown off his guard, told more than was perhaps advisable. In short, when Roper had condemned her union with Field, of which he seemed fully aware, the other admitted that she was living apart

from her husband with his Aunt Wards at Swithland.

They had parted on friendly terms, these two old rivals who had risen in the world, and here again they were meeting and greeting like old friends. William bore no enmity to a living creature, and he suspected none.

On his part Joseph Roper appeared as open as the eye of day. He spoke of his distaste for a country life as a well-known fact, asked "if there was any opening in Birmingham for a man of spirit and some means," and expressed a desire to become acquainted with his friend's wife.

The world then was larger than it is now. At least, distance had not been disturbed by steam and telegraphy. So, although Roper lived within a reasonable distance of Nottingham, he came upon William on the race-ground as a surprise, not being looked for.

Judge, then, his greater amazement when within the next half-hour he beheld the little bow-legged tailor, Tommy Green, whom he might have supposed at work on Mr. Perry's shop-board, and with him a strangely dressed woman who was telling fortunes, a masculine woman having a hare-lip, and only one eye with a cast in it.

For a moment his heart misgave him; he expected to hear the man bawl after him

insultingly as usual, and shrank within himself. It was quite a relief to observe the pair slink away as if to avoid his scrutiny.

To see Peg there was not unlikely, but what brought the lazy tailor there, and in her company? It would have surprised them still more could he have known that she was no longer Peg Harris, but Tommy Green's wife, and that Vill had been the means of bringing the unlovely pair together.

Roper, who had been discharged from the army with a wound and a pension for one of those exploits performed when the natural coward becomes desperate, stuck pretty closely to William Hutton as if in good comradeship, being equally well mounted and the better horseman of the two.

This suited the paper-merchant, who was formed for companionship, and had risen above his early associates without forming a higher connection in Nottingham.

Old grudges were forgotten, on his side at least. And although the races had drawn Joseph Roper thither, and he had at first offered to take odds against the favourite (which William settled with a brief "I never wager"), he appeared to take less interest in the running than in chatting over bygone days, and the people they had mutually known.

And someway, whatever was the topic of conversation he seemed to turn it round to Dolly Parker until Mr. Hutton could not forbear saying:

"Ah, Roper, your head seems to run upon Dolly. Remember a jilt for twenty years? I thought the old campaigner had forgotten. Take a wife, man, and forget."

"Twenty years or fifty are as one to me, I *never* forget!" was the unexpected answer, in a tone as peculiar and incisive as was the sudden contraction of Roper's brow and lip. Another moment he was the same hearty and jolly companion as before, and intent on the placing of the horses for the great race of the day.

There was a general stoppage of all other sport; the start was made; the spectators craned their necks almost breathless with excitement; horses and riders flashed along the course; betting was heavy on Careless, when—a skilful touch of jockeydom sent Atlas past the winning-post, ahead.

A deafening roar of mingled shouts, groans, and execrations rent the air. Nottingham men had largely backed the Nottingham horse, and the reckoning would be terrible.

Men rushed away with frenzied faces, others sat there stolid, blank, despairing.

"I've had enough of this," cried Mr. Hutton,

turning to quit the course. "The recklessness of gamblers is criminal. Do you, sir, go through the forest? If so, I will bear you company a mile or so." Then, as they rode along at a jog-trot pace, he remarked, as a sort of after-thought,

"It ill becomes me to pass strictures on gambling. I've been speculating in a paper-mill quite as insanely."

Roper was all ears. "How so?" he asked.

The story of the paper-mill was briefly told. Roper listened, made a suggestion for its conversion into a corn-mill, and whilst dilating on the profits to accrue there was an affrighted shout behind them from people on the forest road, a sound of rapid hoof-beats—a flying steed with lips afoam wildly racing past them with its scarlet coated rider to destruction.

There was a sudden plunge in a hollow in the wretched road—the horse was on its knees, was staggering to its feet and off again—its rider left a senseless heap on the outcropping roots of a giant oak, with gaping rustics standing helpless by.

END OF VOL. II.

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